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B.F.20

SERMONS,

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

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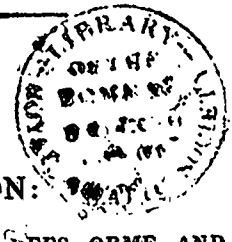
BY THE LATE

RICHARD PRICE, D.D. F.R.S.

B. F. 20



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PREFACE.

THE following Sermons have been selected from the great number which Dr. PRICE had left behind him, as well on account of the subjects of which they treat, as of the candid and liberal spirit which is displayed in every sentence of them. On the *doctrinal* parts of the Christian religion, many and very opposite opinions are entertained; but it is hardly possible that there should be any difference of opinion on the great and important truths contained in the *moral precepts* of the gospel. On these, all persons of every persuasion must agree; and in the following discourses, which are wholly intended to enforce the practice of those precepts, I am not aware that any sentiment will be found which can afford matter

for controversy, or be rejected from the creed of any one who believes that a virtuous conduct is necessary to secure the approbation of his Maker.

Having, in a late publication, endeavoured to give an account of all that was most important in the life and writings of the Author, it will be unnecessary here to enter into the farther discussion of them. Of the many virtues which adorned and dignified his character, none shine more conspicuously in these Sermons, than his candor, benevolence, and piety. The same gentleness of spirit which regulated every action of his life, is here displayed with peculiar grace; and happy would it be for the world, if the like spirit tempered the zeal of all the professors of religion.

I have only to observe farther, that these Sermons have been copied literally from Dr. PRICE's manuscripts, and that it is probable, had he lived to have published them himself, that they would have undergone many

corrections and additions. These I have neither attempted, nor thought myself capable of performing. Nevertheless, though the evil could not be remedied, I did not think it of sufficient magnitude to prevent this publication; being convinced that a few defects will be much more than compensated by the general excellence of these Sermons, and by the honest warmth and energy with which the great truths they contain are recommended and enforced.

W. M.

Lately published,

MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE OF DR. PRICE,

By WILLIAM MORGAN, F.R.S.

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SERMON I.

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MATTHEW, xi. 25.

At that time Jesus answered and said: I thank thee, O Father of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.

THESE words are remarkable and striking. In discoursing on them, my intention is, 1st, to shew you who are meant in them by the wise and prudent as opposed to babes; and 2dly, to enquire upon what particular reasons the thanksgiving addressed by

our Lord on this occasion to the Deity is founded.

In order to understand the opposite characters here meant by the wise and prudent and babes, it is necessary to consider the occasion on which these words were spoken. They were uttered by our Lord, on hearing the report which the seventy disciples made to him of their success in preaching the gospel. In that hour St. Luke tells us, that is, on hearing their report, he said, "I beheld Satan fall down like lightning from heaven," and then broke forth into this acknowledgement of the wisdom of God, in using such instruments as his apostles and first disciples were, in propagating Christianity, and in revealing the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to babes, that is to such plain men as his apostles were, rather than to the wise and prudent; that is rather than to any persons of more learning and higher rank.

The wisdom of this appointment will appear from the following considerations: in the first place, such men as our Lord's apostles and first disciples were likely to be free from all the prejudices of the wise and learned, and

therefore would necessarily be more open to instruction, and less in danger of mixing any thing foreign and corrupt with the Christian doctrine. The apostles were indeed deeply tinctured with the common prejudices of the Jews about the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, nor was it possible for them to escape these. But as they were plain and artless men, it was possible gradually to set them right, and to bring them to a reception of the naked facts of Christianity. This could not have been so well done had they been men of education and learning. Such men would have been often disputing and cavilling. They would have been starting many objections, suggested by false science. They would have stuck more obstinately to their prejudices, because more conceited, and they would have endeavoured to bring Christianity to a conformity to their own ideas and notions. In short, the minds of such men, being fuller of false maxims, would have made more opposition to the gospel, and rendered an adulteration of it less possible to be avoided. Suppose, for instance, that instead of such plain and unlearned persons as the apostles, a number of learned scribes and pharisees had been chosen to be our Lord's attendants and

the preachers of his gospel; how difficult would it have been to engage them to follow Jesus amidst poverty and reproach? How backward would they have been in giving up the traditions of the elders and all their preconceived notions? How apt would they have been to colour over the truths of the gospel in such a manner as might render them more conformable to their own prejudices and less offensive to the taste of mankind; and with what invincible aversion would they have considered particularly the doctrine of a suffering and crucified Messiah?

The like may be said, supposing a number of sage philosophers or learned Platonists had been employed in the office and duty of Christ's apostles. These would have expected nice metaphysical theories and subtle speculations in Christianity. They would have been under temptation to introduce into it the wisdom they had learned in their schools. Its genuine doctrine would have appeared foolishness to them, and it would have been scarcely possible for them to receive and teach it without corrupting it. What I am now observing, experience has proved to be true. It is well known, that in the first centuries after

the establishment of Christianity, the introduction of the Grecian and Roman learning into it was the means of soon corrupting it. The persons who were brought over to it from the schools of the philosophers imported with them the philosophical speculations to which they had been accustomed, and, in consequence of this, they blended with it many unintelligible principles, and at last made it nothing but a subject for controversy and a heap of scholastic jargon, instead of a bond of charity, and a system of plain precepts and facts. Such observations as these have, I acknowledge, a tendency to sink human learning in our esteem. But it should be remembered, that it is the learning of the times of the apostles that I have chiefly in view. This was indeed, for the most part, but little better than deep-rooted prejudice and ostentatious ignorance. St. Paul speaks of it under the titles of *science falsely so called, and a wisdom of words*; and he has observed very strongly, "that it was necessary that those who possessed it should throw it off, in order to become truly wise." 1 Cor. xiii. 18. *Let no one*, says he, *deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise, for the*

wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. It is easy to see that it is more desirable to be quite plain and uncultivated as the apostles were, than possessed of such learning. A rude and plain man, who is at the same time sincere and honest, is infinitely better prepared for instruction, and more likely to receive truth, and to hold it untainted, than a man who is fraught with false speculations, and armed against truth by false learning. There is the same difference between these two men, as there is between a sound eye and an eye that has a disorder in it. The former will easily admit the light, and convey just impressions from external objects; but the latter will either admit no light, or tincture it with false colours. I will venture to add, that this is true not only of the learning of the times of the apostles, but also in some measure of the learning of all times. A great deal of the learning of the world has always been a mere wisdom of words, or a specious sophistry, which has served no other end than to blind the mind more, and to set it at a greater distance from real wisdom. The teachings in schools and universities have commonly been, not an opening of the mind, or a preparation of it for free and successful

enquiries into truth, but a contraction of the mind, the instiling of falsehood and nonsense into it, and the furnishing it with skill and resolution to support them. Such has human learning been, and such it still is too much.

But mistake me not. It is far from my intention to depreciate learning in general. True learning, or real knowledge, is without doubt a noble and divine talent. It is one of the mind's chief excellencies, and life's chief ornament and blessing; nor is it possible that we should take too much pains to improve in it. But that learning of which it has been most usual to boast, and which hitherto has been most valued and taught, is what I have been describing;—the corruption of the mind, and not its improvement,—an increase of its darkness and prejudices, and not the removal of them.

A little discernment will shew us, that even in the present age there are not any errors more strange, or any prejudices more pitiful and unconquerable, than those of several learned men; and, for my own part, were it offered to my choice, whether I would have the void mind of a common, but honest man of plain

sense, or a mind like to that of many a deep professor of human learning: — were this, I say, offered to my choice, I should, I hope, without hesitation prefer the former.

Our blessed Saviour seems plainly to have entertained sentiments of this kind, and to have been led by them to chuse a number of unlettered men, rather than any of the wise and prudent, for the purpose of receiving instructions in his gospel, and teaching it to mankind.

There can, therefore, be no reason for wondering at his conduct in this respect. There is no person who, were he to chuse one to whom he would convey instruction on any point, would not chuse one who knew nothing of the point, rather than one whose ideas and opinions lie against it. Were he, for instance, to chuse one whom he would instruct in the true system of the world according to the modern discoveries, he would sooner chuse one who was a stranger to philosophy, than one who had deeply imbibed a false philosophy, and was skilled in all the methods of defending it. The former would have nothing to do but to learn and improve;

the latter, on the contrary would have a great deal to unlearn, and it would be necessary to empty and to alter his whole mind before he could be made a proper subject for instruction, or a proper receptacle for truth.

But there is another observation that deserves here to be mentioned, in order to shew the wisdom of Christ in the choice of his apostles. It should be remembered, that it was necessary that the persons whom our Lord chose to propagate his gospel should attend him constantly, during the time of his public ministry. Without this they could not be duly prepared for their office, or be proper witnesses of those grand facts of Christianity which it was to be their chief business to declare to the world. Now let any one think whether a number of learned scribes would have been so subject to restraint as the apostles were, so likely to follow Christ quietly and patiently for years, in the midst of difficulties, and so capable of being held in suspense with respect to the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, and of bearing to be at last disappointed in their expectations. Nothing is plainer than the reverse.

We find, that it was not always easy to keep even the Apostles within due bounds. They often wanted to engage our Lord to set up his standard as the great prince and conqueror they expected in the Messiah. They seem once to have concurred with the multitude, in endeavouring to force him to this; and one of them at last grew so weary of his master's delays, that he took the method of betraying him into the hands of his enemies, in order to put him under a necessity of either erecting his kingdom immediately, or consenting to be crushed and ruined. It is evident, that men of rank and learning would have been much more prone to such conduct. They would have been more ambitious and more enterprizing. They would have been continually counteracting our Lord, and interrupting him in his ministry, by publishing his real character to the world, and encouraging insurrection in his favour. In a word, it would have been either not possible to keep them in that inaction with respect to the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, which was necessary, or they would have been offended in our Lord, and soon forsaken him.

But there still remain some more observa-

tions, which are necessary to be attended to, in order to have a full view of the wisdom of Christ, in prefering the unlearned to the learned in the choice of his Apostles. It should be considered particularly, how much stronger the evidences of Christianity are rendered in consequence of this, than they could have otherwise been. There is scarcely an argument for Christianity which does not receive additional strength from the consideration of the meanness of the instruments by which it was established in the world. Had the wise and the prudent been employed to preach it, there would have been room for saying, that it made its way by their address and eloquence; or, that it was a trick of state, or contrivance of worldly policy,—and the history of our Saviour, instead of being a plain and simple narrative, would probably have been written with eloquence, and drest up in ornament. The consequence of which would have been, the loss of one of the strongest proofs of its truth. But there has been no foundation left for any objections and inconveniencies of this kind.

Though the excellent moral precepts and doctrines of Christianity might come from

men of learning without supernatural aid, yet it is very unlikely that they should come from such men as the Apostles without such aid. Though it could be supposed, that a character so wonderful, so peculiar, and so well supported, as that of our Saviour, might be invented by the wise and the prudent, yet certainly it could not be invented by the ignorant and illiterate. The conversion of myriads of mankind to Christianity, in a few years, in opposition to all the powers of the world, by a set of poor mechanics and fishermen, without craft or force:—This is an undoubted fact, which contains an argument for Christianity of irresistible weight. But it is plain that it would have had no weight, had the Apostles been men of rank, or superior knowledge and learning. What I am now observing, St. Paul had plainly in view, when he said, 1 Cor. i. 27, "*that God had chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.*" The reason of which he intimates was, that the faith of Christians might stand on the power of God, and not the wisdom of men; or, as he elsewhere says, the treasure of the gospel was put into

earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power might be of God, and not of men. 2 Cor. iv. 7.

Upon the whole, an attentive person cannot, I think, but be engaged by all that has been said to admire that part of the conduct of Providence, with respect to the establishment of Christianity which I have been considering. Justly, indeed, might our Lord bless God on that account, and ascribe glory to him for his wisdom in revealing the gospel to such babes as the Apostles, and employing them to convey its truths and facts to the world, rather than any of the wise and the learned.

But there is reason to think, that what I have hitherto insisted upon, is not all that our Lord had in view in the words I am considering. By the wise and the prudent, he meant not merely such as possessed the wisdom and learning of the times, but also the men who were proud and conceited on that account, and under the influence of those vices which are sometimes united to wit and learning. By babes, on the contrary, it is evident, that he meant not merely persons

destitute of the wisdom of this world, but also the meek, the modest, and humble; or men, who at the same time that they knew little of the learning of the times, possessed simplicity, honesty, and teachableness. He intended, therefore, in this passage, further to praise God for so ordering the constitution of his government, as that the simple and lowly, though unlearned, should be more likely to see the light of truth, and to receive his gospel, than any of the wise doctors and proud sophists of the world. He did not mean to prefer ignorance to true knowledge, or a weak to a sound judgment. It would be in the highest degree unreasonable to suppose this. But his intention was to express a preference of honesty and simplicity without learning, to learning without honesty and simplicity; or, in general, to intimate this very important truth, that the best qualification for religious instruction, and our best recommendation to the enlightening influence of the Deity, is an upright and humble temper, free from the pride and learning, and the sinister views of ambition.

That our Lord meant persons of this temper by babes, is plain, from Math. xviii. 1, 2, 3,

where we are told, that on occasion of a dispute between his disciples about the greatest places in his kingdom, he called a child to him, and after placing him in the midst of them, said, "*Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself, and become as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven;*" that is, except you divest yourselves of ambition, and become like little children, in an unaffected lowliness and docility, you will have no share in the advantages of the Messiah's kingdom.

Our Lord, during his public ministry, always gave the preference to men of this child-like character. He encouraged and received them, while he rejected the learned Scribes and Pharisees. These were the persons whom he meant by his sheep, who would hear his voice, and come to him. It was because his apostles were in this sense babes, that he told them, Math. xiii. 11, "that to them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." There is nothing indeed that prepares us more for the reception of truth than an honest simplicity. The

man who has this, be his parts ever so mean, is more valuable in the sight of heaven than the greatest scholar or philosopher who is full of his own wisdom. He has, in the probity of his mind, and plain common sense, a surer guide to truth than all the learning in the world; the effect of which has often been to confound and debauch the mind. One honest and candid disposition is infinitely preferable to the greatest stores of wit and literature, and recommends us more to the Deity.

What I am now saying, suggests to us two reasons why such persons as our Lord calls babes shall understand religious truth, while those whom he calls the wise and prudent shall remain in darkness. 1st, The natural tendency of things renders this likely. The man of plain sense and humble dispositions, has less in him to obstruct the entrance of truth. He is more teachable, more willing to hearken to instruction, and more open to conviction. He has fewer errors and prejudices to give up. His understanding is more free from the influence of blinding passions, and therefore more likely to be clear and sound. In the 2d place, this man possesses particular security from the favor of God.

The candour and docility of his mind not only gives it a particular aptness to discern truth, and render the way easy for the introduction of truth into it, but also to draw into it heavenly illuminations. In consequence, therefore, of the righteous judgment of God, as well as the necessary nature of things, this man may expect that important truths shall be discovered to him, while they continue hid from the wise and prudent. Those who will not humble themselves, and become as little children, in seeking wisdom, cannot possibly attain to it. God pours contempt on what vain men reckon their superior knowledge, and he often sees fit to punish the arrogance of proud sophists, by suffering them to plunge further and further into error, till they lose entirely the light of truth. *He takes delight in setting up those that are low, but the understanding of the prudent he brings to nothing, and the wise he takes in their own craftiness.* 1 Cor. i. 19.

A simple spirit is our chief excellence, and it is this, chiefly, that gives to one human being a preference to another in his estimation. *He feeds the hungry with good things, but the rich he sends empty away. The*

weak will he guide in judgment, and to the upright will he teach his way. None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. Dan. xii. 10.

We cannot but be sensible of the dependance of our minds upon the Deity for the discovery of truth, and the acquisition of wisdom. We cannot, therefore, be too anxious about bringing them under his favourable influence, by emptying them of all self-conceit, and establishing in them a sincere affection to truth, and a readiness to entertain it wheresoever it can be found. The conduct of Divine Providence, in the first establishment of Christianity, affords one remarkable instance of the peculiar favour shewn by heaven to plain and simple men, in the communication of religious instruction. Such were the men who at first were brought over to Christianity, and not the learned doctors, or sagacious politicians of the times. *To the poor*, our Lord tells us, *the gospel was preached.—God chose the poor of this world*, St. James says, *rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to those who love him.*

Not many wise men after the flesh,—not many mighty,—not many noble were called. Indeed it was happy for Christianity that many of these did not at first embrace it. For had this happened, it would have lost its purity much sooner than it did; and it would not have been easy (as hath been already observed) to prove, that it made its way by supernatural aid, and not by human power and policy. This very fact, however, or the general unbelief of the wise and prudent of this world, in the first ages, has been turned into an objection against Christianity; and it is very remarkable, that we find Christ, in my text, glorying in the very circumstance which some have considered as dishonourable to his gospel. How much reason Christ had for this, has, I hope, appeared sufficiently from what I have been saying.

Those whom he means by babes, were much better prepared for his religion than those were, whom he means by the wise and prudent. The latter could not receive it without laying down at the feet of Jesus those theories and speculations in which they prided themselves,—without renouncing all that imaginary wisdom, which they highly valued, and

accounting (like St. Paul) what they had before learned, "loss and dung, for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus:" It was not possible that a doctrine, so plain and simple as that of the gospel, should easily gain the approbation of the self-sufficient scribe, or the sophistical disputer of this world.

Salvation, through a crucified Messiah, was necessarily to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. No one, who considers things properly, will think this to be any just objection to Christianity. Truth must be more unlikely to be received by the falsely learned, than by any persons. Their pride makes them less willing to be instructed, and the arts of disputation which they have learned, make them more capable of evading evidence, and less ready to yield to it. Let us suppose, that instead of religious knowledge, Christianity had communicated to the world a system of philosophy, contrary to that which was commonly received at the time of our Saviour. Let us, for instance, suppose that Christ and his apostles had gone about preaching the true Copernican system of the world. In that case, I am persuaded,

that whatever credentials they carried with them, they would have been treated every where with contempt. The doctrine, that the sun was in the centre of the world, and that the earth and planets moved round him, would have been heard with as much prejudice as Christ's cross was. But what I mean to observe chiefly, is, that this would have been particularly the case with the *learned* of the time. Plain men being more humble and teachable, would have sooner laid down their prejudices; but the learned would have received with sovereign disdain such information. They would have looked down with derision on the attempts of such people as the apostles, to instruct them. They stood guarded against the approaches of truth, by a false wisdom. They had entrenched themselves in subtle theories and hypotheses; and invented cycles and epicycles, by which they could explain all the heavenly motions, and answer all objections. Their resistance, therefore, to Christianity, had it taught the true philosophy instead of the true religion, would have been greater than that of any other men; and, most probably, they would have been the last who would have embraced it. These observations shew us, that we need not wonder

that many of those whom our Lord means by the wise and prudent, did not at first come over to Christianity. Real knowledge is always a step to further knowledge, and a preparation for further light; but false knowledge of every kind, especially if it is accompanied (as it generally is) with conceit and self-sufficiency, turns the minds of those who have it, more aside from truth, and renders them less susceptible of instruction and improvement than any persons.

What I have now said has gone on the supposition, that few or none of the wise and learned, embraced the gospel at the time of its first establishment. This, however, is not true in the sense and degree in which some may be willing to think. Several persons of improved talents, and in the higher situations of life, were converted to Christianity by the preaching of the apostles. It would be easy to shew this, by an enumeration of instances; but it is time for me to proceed to some reflections which offer themselves, and with which I shall close the present subject.

In the first place, what I have been saying should teach caution to those who think them-

selves wise and prudent. They should be very careful, lest what they call their learning, should be nothing but delusion, and prove the means of entangling them in worse prejudices than those to which other men are subject. This has, undoubtedly, been the case with a great deal that has been admired in the world, under the name of learning; and it is most melancholy to consider, how many of the laboured systems, which have prevailed in different ages, have been all dreams; and how frequently learned men, when they have been triumphing in their superior light and sagacity, have been only enjoying the paradise of fools. It is remarkable, what contempt our Lord poured on the wisdom of this world, by chusing such men as the apostles to instruct mankind in the truths of Christianity; and by calling into his church the poor, while he rejected the wise and prudent. It becomes us then to be upon our guard, remembering what danger there is; that while we are labouring to furnish our minds with science, we may be stuffing them with pride and falsehood, and prejudice. It must, however, be acknowledged, that after our utmost care, we shall be in danger of having a great deal of the light that is in us darkness. There

is no security to be obtained by any human being against mistakes. In these circumstances, it is comfortable to reflect, that if we keep ourselves humble and upright, no mistakes into which we may fall, will prove of any fatal consequence to us.

The great evil of false wisdom, is its filling the mind with conceit, and arrogance, and prejudice. It is not so much simple error that can hurt us, as error accompanied with these dispositions, and thus rendering us incapable of instruction, and inaccessible to truth. Let us then endeavour, as much as we can, to avoid error, and to empty our minds of all false knowledge. But as we cannot hope to do this effectually; and as, possibly, our most favourite opinions are not right, let us above all things labour to acquire humility and probity; and to maintain a sense of our own fallibility, and a diffidence with respect to our opinions. This will prevent all the bad effects of error on our minds. Had the learned of our Saviour's time done this, they would not have rejected Christianity, and lost its inconceivable advantages. Though we cannot be infallible, we may be honest. We may preserve free and candid minds.

We may be teachable, and open to conviction, and always ready to hearken to evidence and information, from whatever quarter they may come. If this is our temper and character, we possess the favour of the Deity, and whether learned or unlearned, we are of the number of those babes whom Christ approves and loves; and who are, by far, the most valuable and worthy part of mankind. But this leads me to desire you to reflect, particularly on this occasion, on the great importance of humility and simplicity. He that possesses these, be his erudition ever so small, may hope that (while the wise and learned are, perhaps, plunging deeper and deeper into darkness) he shall be led into all necessary truth. Were Christ now in the world to teach mankind, persons of this character would be chosen by him to be his disciples in preference to any other persons. He that feels most his own darkness is likely to receive most light. He who thinks he knows little is in the way to attain the greatest real knowledge. Our Lord's general maxim holds here as well as in numberless other instances. "*He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be abased.*" The world is apt to entertain high sentiments of

the superiority of men of sense and learning; and these sentiments have a just and proper foundation. True science is a noble and divine thing; but we should never forget that there is one thing infinitely more noble, and that is, that simplicity and docility of disposition which I have been speaking of, and which will constitute us babes in Christ's sense. This is our chief glory and truest ornament. Without this our wisdom will be folly, and our knowledge a curse. There is, without doubt, no inconsistence between these, though they are very often separated. The best disposition of heart may be joined to the richest furniture in the head. We may be children in respect of modesty, and lowliness, and teachableness, and yet men in understanding. We may be knowing and learned in the highest degree, and at the same time humble, meek, candid, and void of guile and prejudice. Indeed, where there is the truest wisdom there will be the most of these qualities; nor is any learning worth the wishing for, which has not a tendency to promote and improve them. It is only that spurious wisdom or science, falsely so called, which our Lord had in view in my text, that makes men vain, and arrogant, and dogmatical. As

far as any learning has this effect it only renders a person more contemptible. But superior knowledge joined to superior candor—the guileless simplicity of a child united to a real improvement of the faculties by learning—this forms a character completely excellent and great. On the contrary, false learning joined to ostentation and vanity—a wisdom that is nothing but folly, and that at the same time puffs up with pride, and produces a contempt for instruction;—this is truly one of the most lamentable objects that we can think of. Wheresoever there is such wisdom, there is an incapacity for all improvement, and an end of *true* wisdom. Such were the wise and prudent to whom our Lord refers in my text. Such were the scribes and pharisees, and in general the learned among Jews and heathens. What advantages were they deprived of by these prejudices, which caused them to be offended with our Saviour, and to reject without examination his gospel? Let us take care that similar prejudices do not in like manner mislead us, by causing us to reject, without proper examination, any information that can be offered to us. Let us be ready to give a due hearing to all evidence, howsoever contrary it may be to our precon-

ceived notions, and dread the thoughts of acting as if we were so wise as to need no further instruction. It is a general rule of God's government, that it is by humbling ourselves that we shall rise and improve.

Blessed are all who love truth above all things, and are willing to embrace and follow it wherever they can find it. Blessed are all who have cleared their minds of ambition and pride and criminal prejudices: who are thoroughly sensible of their own darkness, who seek truth with the simplicity of children, and are inclined to receive with thankfulness every help in discovering it; who lay themselves down as learners at the feet of Jesus, wishing for nothing but that they may be led to know and do the will of God. These are Christ's babes, and so fit is it that they should be favoured preferably to others —so much superior subjects for instruction are they, and so much fitter receptacles for truth, that we may well join with our Lord in ascribing glory to God for so ordering the constitution of things, as that those should come at the knowledge of truth, and know of Christ's doctrine whether it be of God, while the wise and the prudent, the men who

value themselves on their sagacity and learning, but want true candour and simplicity, shall remain destitute of true wisdom, and sink deeper into error and prejudice.

SERMON II.

ANALOGY BETWEEN OUR PRESENT STATE AND A STATE OF CHILDHOOD.

1 CORINTHIANS, xiii. 11.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things.

I SCARCELY need tell you, that the apostle in these words speaks of our condition now, compared with our condition hereafter, and that they are intended to represent the difference between these two conditions as similar to the difference between the condition of a child and that of a grown man. They might, I believe, have been better translated in the following manner: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I was affected as a child, I reasoned as a child; but when I became a man, I put away what

is childish." The apostle immediately adds in the next verse—"For now we see through a glass darkly; but then we shall see face to face." These words, likewise, seem not to be correctly translated; for, in the time of the apostles, dioptric glasses (that is, glasses for the purpose of helping the sight, by looking through them at distant objects) were not invented. The glass, therefore, meant in these words is a mirror, in which we see the images of objects by a reflection of the rays of light; and they might have been rendered; "Now we see in an obscure manner as by means of a mirror, but then we shall see face to face;" that is, "we shall then look at the objects themselves, and not at those images, as we do when we look at an object in a mirror." He goes on;—"now I know in part, but then I shall know as I am known; and now abideth faith, hope, and charity,—these three; but the greatest of these three is charity." The original word translated *charity* in the New Testament, almost every where signifies the same with the word *love* or *benevolence* in our language; and it would have been better to have translated it thus, and then these last words would have run thus:—"and now abide faith, hope, love—these

three; but the greatest of these is love." This is a charming passage; but my present intention is only to take notice of that part of it, in which our present and future state are compared to a state of childhood and a state of manhood.—"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I was affected as a child, I reasoned as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things."

In speaking on these words, I shall endeavour to shew you, in a few particulars, how our present state answers to this account of it, or to trace the analogy between it and a state of childhood.

In a more loose way I might, on this subject, observe to you, that our pursuits, our cares, our sorrows, and our joys, are too often like those of children, low, trifling, and frivolous. Were we properly affected and informed, we should pursue nothing eagerly but virtue. We should be anxious about nothing, but acting well the part assigned us in life, and we should place our chief happiness, and found our chief joy in doing our duty, and obeying our Maker: for nothing else being very important to us, it is in this that all our

cares, and fears, and pursuits ought to centre. But how far is this from being the general temper of mankind? How childish are they in their sentiments and conduct? mistaking continually falshood for sacred truth — pursuing shadows as if they were realities, and prefering what is shewy to what is solid and eternal? Where can we find true manliness and integrity — a steadiness not to be shaken by low passions — a love of truth, not to be warped by silly prejudices, and an elevation of mind, not to be depressed by the temptations and trials of this world?

Children are apt to be wayward, and fickle, and capricious, — one moment displeased with what the moment before they admired, — delighted with toys, and grieving when a foolish fancy cannot be gratified. Such is also the case with men; nor can I view a courtier, who sets his heart upon a ribband, in any higher light than I do a child who cries for a trinket, or is proud of his fine cloaths. What ideas may we suppose, do superior beings entertain of us? How childish must they think us? How absurd and contemptible do most of our joys, and fears, and employments appear to them? In their eyes we never appear respectable, ex-

cept when we govern an irregular passion, utter an humble prayer, relieve the wants of a fellow-creature, or in any other instance exercise a virtuous disposition. Our levities and inconstancies, our variable and peevish humours, our groundless attachments, our unreasonable prejudices and gross mistakes, all shew our weakness, and prove us to be in the infancy of our existence. "We speak as children—we think as children—we reason as children."

But it will be proper to explain this subject more distinctly, and to carry our ideas a little higher. Let us, therefore, consider, 1st, that our present existence, compared with our future, is a childhood in respect of its duration. As the time of childhood is but a small part of our present existence, so our present existence itself is but a small part of our whole existence. There is in reality in this case no room for comparison. We are to exist for ever. The sun and stars will be extinguished, and the world itself be dissolved, but we are to survive, and after the lapse of millions of future ages to feel ourselves the same beings that we are now. What then is this life? How justly may it be called our childhood? The strict truth is, that

it is no more than our entrance into being — our birth into the vast creation — the first glimmering of light at the dawn of day. It is difficult to consider this properly. Could we obtain a due sense of it, and enter fully into the reflection that we are to enjoy an existence commensurate with that of the Deity, and to partake of his eternity, it would appear scarcely possible to be true, and our faculties would be overwhelmed.

Again; this life is our childhood in respect of improvement. This is what the apostle refers to, by saying that we think and reason like children, and that now we know in part, but that hereafter we shall know as we are known. Childhood is a time of ignorance and folly. Our faculties are then opening, and reason begins to shew itself. Such is our whole present existence compared with our future. At our best state in this world we may say of ourselves, with the utmost propriety, that we know nothing, and are nothing. It is hereafter that we are to become wise and knowing. We now mistake presumption for knowledge, a strange imagination for a sound understanding, and the delusions of passion for the perceptions of truth.

Hereafter our intellectual powers will acquire vigour. We shall wonder at our present follies as we now do at those of children. We shall see intuitively those truths which we now are obliged to make out by long and intricate deductions. That eternal and infinite mind, of which we have now only a glimpse, will become more an object of our discernment; and being no more confined to this little corner of the immense creation, we shall see more of it, and understand better its structure and laws. What an improvement will this be! What a happiness shall we experience when we shall be delivered from this childish world! When the causes that now cramp our powers, and obstruct our prospect of the creation, shall be removed, and nature be unveiled to us! — When, in short, we shall become *men*, know as we are known, and feel and think as superior beings do!

I might go on to observe to you, that we are now children in respect of power and dignity. This is implied in what I have just said. Fluctuating at best and very feeble is our present condition. Hereafter our condition will be more fixed and stable. Our powers will be enlarged, and we shall rise to a dignity and weight in the universe, of which

we can now form no conception. But it is necessary that I should endeavour to give you a yet more accurate view of this subject, by observing to you, that this life answers to the idea of a childhood, as it is an introduction to, and a state of education for, another and a higher state. It is in this, chiefly, that the analogy consists between the present life and a state of childhood; and, therefore, I will endeavour to give you a particular explanation of it.

Man, we see, is not made at once that creature which he is designed to be. His existence is progressive, and he is made to rise by steps, and to pass through a succession of stages, each one of which prepares him for the next that follows it. In the womb, we are prepared for birth, and formed by a gradual growth from the condition of an embryo, for that higher mode of existence which begins when, in the condition of blind and helpless infants, we draw with a cry our first breath. Infancy prepares for childhood, and childhood for manhood. As we pass through these several stages, we are continually becoming more and more familiarised to the scene in which we are placed. We acquire increasing knowledge and experience, and

learn gradually those lessons and habits which are necessary to qualify us for our highest and best state in this world. And it is easy to perceive, that were we to be brought into life *full grown*, or to be made men without passing through infancy and childhood, we should be totally incapable of relishing life, and as unfit for it as we should be for conversation, had we never been taught language; or for enjoyment and happiness, were we destitute of senses. Thus is the beginning of our existence here, a natural and necessary preparation for mature life; and in like manner, the whole of our mature life itself is a necessary preparation for that future life on which we are to enter at death. Were we to enter at once on another world, without having passed through this world, we should, probably, be as incapable of existing in it, as a child in the womb is of the existence of a man. Should you ask me here, in what manner, and by what means, this life is thus an education for another? I would answer, that it is so particularly by the instruction and the habits which are the necessary consequence to all of passing through this life; but that it is so principally by that instruction in righteousness, and those habits of self-

government and virtue, which we are put upon acquiring in this life.

Virtue, you must always remember, is the grand condition of happiness under the divine government. Without this, we cannot be qualified for permanent existence, or any honourable situation in the universe. It is this, therefore, that we must chiefly be placed here to learn. It is self-evident, that a righteous Being can favour none but the righteous; and, consequently, that an existence hereafter, not only eternal but eternally improving (as all reasonable existence must be, if continued) can be enjoyed only by the righteous. It is proper to add, that as the author of nature has so ordered our circumstances in this world, as to make early life fit to be an education for mature life, so likewise has he so ordered our circumstances in mature life, as to adapt it to the purpose of an education in virtue. This we are continually experiencing, as we pass through the world. We cannot act an uniformly right part without constant attention and watchfulness. We cannot proceed a step in life without finding opportunities for practising some virtue, without being required to resist some

temptation, to check some wrong tendency, to discharge some duty, to govern some passion, to cherish some grace, or to stand some trial. Our meekness, our pity, our temperance, our benevolence, our patient resignation are brought forth into exercise by numberless events that are perpetually occurring; so that there is scarcely a moment of active life which does not furnish us with the means of moral improvement. In prosperity as well as adversity, in the cottage as well as the palace, in health and in sickness, in youth and old age, in private and in public life, in every business that we can undertake, and every profession and occupation that can employ us, our good dispositions are called forth, and occasions given us for displaying and confirming them. So excellently fitted is this world for a school of virtue.

Another sense in which our education in this world for another, corresponds with our education in early or mature life, is the necessity we are under in both capacities of submitting to strict, and, sometimes, painful discipline, the reason and uses of which we may not be able to understand. Children are trained up by restraint and correction, the

tendency of which they do not see, and which, therefore, they are apt to think hard and severe. So it is with us, as probationers and candidates for eternity. We have many hard lessons given us to learn. We are often made to suffer a severe discipline, and, not distinctly perceiving how it can be useful to us, we are too much disposed to quarrel with it, and, like children, to murmur and repine. But the principal observation to my present purpose is, that the success of our education, in both capacities, is made to depend on our activity and industry. It is obvious, that our happiness when men, depends in a great degree on our conduct when young; and, that the turn we take, the habits we contract, and the bent that is given us as we grow up from infancy to maturity, determine the colour and fate of all our subsequent days.

Idleness and laziness in youth form a manhood void of worth and dignity; and a worthless and vicious manhood forms a wretched old age. On the contrary, virtuous, faithful, modest, sober, and well-educated youths always come out with advantage into the world. They recommend themselves to all who know them, and are sure of finding

encouragement in every walk of life for which they may be intended. There are not, indeed, any objects of more general delight than such young persons. They are, therefore, likely to rise to usefulness and credit; and to become happy in themselves, and blessings to society; and when they have arrived at old age, they will have laid up such a store of blessings in a well-established character, and the respect and consequence they will have acquired, as will mitigate its inconveniencies, support under its infirmities, and make their last days tranquil and honourable.

Such is the dependence of our happiness in the successive stages of the present life, on our conduct in those which have preceded them; and such, likewise, is the dependence of our happiness in our future stages of existence, on our conduct in our present existence. Every particular of what I have just observed of the latter, holds with respect to the former, and our seeing this to be the order of the divine government in the one case, should silence all objections to the credibility of it in the other. As our interest in this world, and, in some degree, even our existence in it, depend on our diligence in early life, so does our interest in another world

(and perhaps even the permanence of our existence in it) depend on our diligence now. As in the education we pass through in youth, we may, by prudence and industry, secure the best blessings, and the most honourable situations when we rise to manhood, so in the more important education which we pass through here, for a future immortality, we may, by our virtuous exertion, and setting ourselves to acquire good habits, and to improve in that perfectness of character, which is the foundation of all permanent bliss under the divine government, fit ourselves for the highest posts hereafter, and rise to inconceivable and eternal honour and glory in the kingdom of heaven. Thus is the issue of both educations committed to ourselves. Thus, in both the capacities I have been speaking of, the divine constitution has ordered, that it shall be left to our own choice either to better our condition and rise and be happy; or to spoil our condition, and sink and perish. This is the plan of God's government. Dignity and bliss here and hereafter are connected with our own endeavours, and offered not to our acceptance, but to our acquisition; and we may be certain, that this is the wisest and the best way of

treating moral agents; and that, in the end, it will produce a greater sum of happiness than could be produced by any other constitution. But this leads me to mention an awful consequence from these observations; and that is, that the issue in both cases being made to depend on ourselves is precarious. Our education in youth for manhood (we all know) may miscarry, and through negligence and vice leave us deficient, ignorant, worthless, and unhappy; or, on the contrary, it may attain its end, lay the foundation of subsequent honour, and make us wise, and worthy, and respectable. The same is true of our whole education here for eternity. This also may miscarry; and instead of qualifying us for the habitations of the just, and a place among superior beings, it may leave us fit associates only for evil beings, or issue in our ruin; and one of the most terrifying of all reflections is, that in both cases, these miscarriages are common. We see, continually, schools and universities sending out pedants and libertines, instead of honest and useful citizens. We see dissipation in early life depriving of all enjoyment in subsequent life, and often terminating in disgrace and shame, and untimely death. And we have reason to

believe, that what is analogous to this, is continually happening with respect to our future destination. This world, I have said, was designed to be a school of virtue, and an education for heaven; but how frequently does it prove a school of vice, and an education for hell! This is the consequence of that option which, in this case, it was proper should be given us; and of the general rule of God's government, not to force happiness on intelligent beings, but to oblige them to earn it by making it the result of their own active industry, assisted by his grace.

I shall conclude, with desiring your attention to the following reflections, which offer themselves to me on the account now given of human life:

1st. It leads us to reflect on the wisdom of God, in ordering the scenes of our existence. He causes us to rise gradually, and to qualify ourselves for happiness, as a necessary condition of obtaining it. He does not throw away his blessings on the slothful and the undeserving, but makes them the rewards of previous diligence, and virtuous labours. Before he brings us to any higher spheres of action,

he puts us into lower ones, and makes every advance in existence to be the effect of a preparation for it, and an introduction to it in a preceding period of our existence. We cannot conceive of a wiser or a better constitution. Every situation of reasonable beings implies and requires particular habits and dispositions, which must be learnt in preceding situations, in order to create a fitness for it, and a capacity of enjoyment in it. That gradation of stages in existence, depending on one another, and introducing one another, which takes place in all that we see of nature, is founded on the best reasons, and is a proof both of the goodness and wisdom of the Creator. To wish to be men without passing through childhood, or to be made angels without being subjected to the preparatory discipline and trials of this world, is much the same with wishing to run before we have learned to walk; to possess knowledge without acquainting ourselves with the elements of knowledge; or to be scholars without being taught letters.

2dly. The subject on which I have been discoursing, should teach us patience under the trials of life, and reconcile us to all present

difficulties. There is, you have heard, a discipline appointed by our heavenly Father to form us for future happiness. Like the corrections of children, they are intended to cure our follies, and to teach us those lessons of obedience and duty, which are necessary to our future welfare. It is true, that in the future state of happiness, there will be no such afflictions as we now suffer; but there may be occasion for that temper of mind, which is now formed by bearing them properly.

3dly. The observations I have made on the subject of this discourse, should render us earnest in our endeavours to make this life what it is designed,—a preparation for a better life,—an introduction to glory,—an education for the joys of angels; or, (to use the metaphorical language of the New Testament) a dressing time for the marriage feast of Christ, and for a seat among the general assembly and church of the first-born, who are hereafter to meet on Mount Zion. Nothing but this deserves our anxiety. Happy are those who, by avoiding guilt and persevering in a course of well-doing, answer the end of their creation, and rise through the trials of time to the riches of eternity.

Lastly; let us bless God for giving us our present existence. It will be our own fault, if it does not prove a gift of unspeakable value. We may make it (through God's help, which is never wanting to those who seek it as they ought,) the first step of an endless progress in dignity and happiness. How pleasing is it to think of this? To look forward to the time when we shall be delivered from the discipline of this life, and put away every thing childish and foolish. To consider that our souls (like seeds just sown) contain in themselves latent principles and powers, which are hereafter to be displayed, and which will be always laying the foundation of new enjoyment and dignity. To reflect that we have before us a boundless world, and that in conjunction with the whole universe of reasonable and virtuous beings, we are to be brightening for ever, and improving for ever, under the eye and care of the Almighty!

This is, indeed, a transporting prospect. But remember, brethren, that the more transporting it is, the more alarming is the reflection, that, like the prospect granted to Moses on Mount Pisgah of the land of Ca-

naan, it is a prospect of happiness that there is danger of losing. God's goodness in giving us our existence is, I have said, unspeakable. But it is a gift that may possibly be withdrawn. Vice throws a cloud over this extatic prospect. The loss of those thoughts that wander through eternity may be the appointed punishment of a course of wickedness. Some, indeed, assert the contrary, and tell us, that through the great Redeemer there will be (after a series of future punishments) a final restitution of all to happiness. Nothing can be more agreeable to my wishes and feelings than such a doctrine. But I must not suffer my wishes to command my conviction. I want more evidence in this case. Though eternal torments cannot take place under the government of a benevolent Deity—final destruction may. I tremble, indeed, when I make these reflections. I am frightened when I think of the possibility of their being just:—"For what (as our blessed Lord says) shall a man be profited, if he should gain the whole world and lose himself?" There is one way, and but one way of avoiding this danger. According to all principles, religious virtue gives the security. May Heaven keep us stedfast in this, lest, by enjoying the hope of eternal

life and being put in the way to it, we should sink at last, swallowed up and lost in the dark womb of uncreated night. May the God of all mercy save us from this end, and bring us to the happiness I have been describing!

SERMON III.

ON THE GREATER IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT PRACTICE THAN OF A SOUND FAITH IN RELIGION.

MATTHEW, vii. 21.

Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you,—depart from me ye that work iniquity.

THESE words are, in my opinion, some of the most striking in the whole New Testament. At the time our Lord spoke them, he had no other external appearance than that of a poor and persecuted man. The

son of a carpenter, destitute of every advantage of birth, rank, and literature. He assumes, however, in them unspeakable dignity, and speaks in the character of the Son and Messenger of the blessed Deity, who was hereafter to judge mankind, and to decide their eternal condition. He knew the tendency which there is in mankind to religious hypocrisy and superstition. He saw how prone they are to lay a stress for acceptance on many things that have no connection with true goodness; and therefore he declares in a manner the most plain and solemn, that nothing but avoiding iniquity, and doing the will of his Father, can be of any consequence to our acceptance, or avail to preserve us from condemnation in that day, when he shall come to call all nations before him to receive their last sentences. In particular, he assures us, that no invocation of his name, no honor we can profess for him, no zeal in preaching his religion, no extraordinary endowments or abilities of any kind, will then recommend us to favour, or do us the least service. We may call him (he tells us) Lord, Lord. We may prophesy in his name, and even cast out demons, and work miracles; but unless we do

God's will, we shall be disowned and rejected by him.

The same doctrine has been taught us in a variety of other places in the gospel history. When a certain person asked our Lord, "Are there few that be saved?" his answer was, "Strive to enter in at the straight gate, for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, he shall answer and say, I know you not whence you are. Then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I know you not whence you are, depart from me all ye workers of iniquity." When he was informed once, that his mother and his brethren stood without, and desired to speak to him, he took occasion to declare, that those only he considered as his mother, brothers, and sisters, (or as entitled to any particular regard from him) who did the will of his Father. When a certain woman once called out in the middle of the crowd, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast

sucked," he replied, "Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it."

When (he tells us in Matth. xiii. 41,) he shall hereafter come at the end of the world, it will be "to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them who do iniquity." "In every nation (as St. Peter has declared on a very solemn occasion) he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." "Circumcision is nothing (says St. Paul) and uncircumcision is nothing;" and for the same reason, we may say, "notions and doctrines are nothing, but keeping the commandments of God." "The kingdom of God (he likewise says in Rom. xiv. 17,) is not meat and drink," that is, it is not the observance of any rites or ceremonies, but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; and it is he only that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God. To the same purpose, and in words that seem to allude to those of my text, the apostle declares, in 1 Cor. xiii. that though he had the gift of prophesying, and understood all mysteries, and though he had all faith, so as to be able to remove mountains, yet if he had not charity, he was nothing.

The well known words of the prophet Micah deserve further your particular recollection here. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself to the most High God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,—the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." But there would be no end of reciting to you all the passages of this kind in the Bible. The uniform and constant doctrine of the Scriptures is, that doing the will of God, and avoiding iniquity, is the end, the sum, and the substance of true religion; and, that all we can profess, or know, or believe, is vain and worthless, when considered as of itself, in any degree a foundation of God's favour, and of future happiness. In such strong terms have the Scriptures asserted this, and so much have they reprobated the contrary doctrine, that I almost wonder, that it has been possible for Christians to make rites and forms so much the object of their zeal, or

or to lay so much stress as they have done on faith and sentiments. This is truly a fact of the most melancholy nature, and one of the most pernicious of all errors; and I hope you will bear with me while in what remains of the present time, I endeavour to prove this, and to hold your attention to the nature, the evidence, the importance, and the consequence of the following truth, *that there is nothing fundamental in religion besides sincerely desiring to know, and faithfully doing the will of God.*

On this subject I desire you would consider, 1st. That had any thing more than I have now asserted, been fundamental, our Lord would certainly not have expressed himself as he does in my text. He would not have declared so absolutely as he does, that nothing but doing the will of his Father was of any value in his sight; but he would have said, what many of his followers are continually saying, that holding the Catholic faith, and receiving such and such doctrines, were likewise necessary. Instead of representing himself, as hereafter, dooming to misery only the workers of iniquity, he would have represented himself as also rejecting and condemn-

ing those who deny certain points of speculation, and holding damnable errors and heresies. In truth, simple error, when not separated from an honest heart, our Lord seems never to consider as an object of dislike or censure. He bestowed the highest commendations on Nathaniel, at the very time that he believed he could not be the true Messiah, from the influence of so poor a prejudice as that nothing good could come out of Nazareth. The apostles, also, were the objects of his approbation and affection, though, in many points, grievously mistaken, and long before they were set right in their notions of his kingdom. He expressed a particular preference of the Roman centurion, mentioned in Math. viii. 5, though a Gentile, and an idolater; and, on observing the excellence of his disposition, took occasion to declare, "that many should come from the east and the west, and sit down in the kingdom of God, while the children of the kingdom should be cast out into outer darkness"—plainly intimating to us, that goodness of heart and right practice, and not any external profession, or rectitude of sentiment are the grounds of God's favour. You are, likewise, well acquainted with the history of Cornelius. So

acceptable was he even in the state of a Pagan, that the most extraordinary means were used to give him more light. Nor can it with any reason be doubted, but that if he had lived before the appearance of Christ in the world, and died in the state of a Pagan, he would have been for ever happy.

But 2dly, consider that a sincere desire to know and to do God's will is a certain preservative from all dangerous error. It would be one of the grossest reflections on the equity and the goodness of God to suppose the contrary, or to imagine that any one in whom this qualification is found can be suffered to perish for want of any necessary instruction or information. This would be to suppose, that he has suspended our salvation on conditions which he does not give us power to perform, and that we may be the objects of his displeasure, though faithfully attached to his laws, and anxious to find out and to do all that he requires of us. Let no one entertain any such apprehensions of the fountain of wisdom and goodness. He who faithfully wishes to know the truth, and who does his best to discover and to practise it, must be approved by the Deity, and cannot possibly mistake funda-

mentally. In all his enquiries he is under the superintendency and protection of heaven. The criminality of error lies entirely in the vicious passions from which it proceeds: but such a person cannot be under the power of any such passions. I had rather indeed infinitely be in the wrong with a humble inquisitive, and honest mind, than be in the right without it. No point of faith which a person with such a temper can reject is essential. "The meek will God guide in judgment. To the upright he will shew his way. The wise shall understand, but none of the wicked shall understand." "He that does the will of God," our Saviour tells us, "shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

3dly. A sincere disposition to receive whatever information God is pleased to give us, may be considered as equivalent in all cases to a right belief. It is an assent already prepared to whatever doctrines God has revealed, and contains all the merit that there can be in the actual reception of them. A person, for instance, who takes the New Testament for the rule of his faith, and studies to form his opinions by it, may be said to believe whatever is revealed, though it should happen

that there are particular doctrines there taught to which (through unavoidable mistake) he does not explicitly assent. By receiving the book that contains such doctrines he gives a virtual assent to them; and by meaning and endeavouring to extend his faith as far as God requires, or reason and evidence will warrant, he possesses all that is necessary or valuable in faith.

As the determination of the will to righteousness is the whole of genuine virtue, and the very thing that constitutes virtue in every action, so the determination of the mind to truth is the whole of genuine faith, and the very thing that gives faith its worth in every point. And as, in order to a virtuous character, it is not necessary that every thing virtuous should be actually exemplified in our conduct, so neither is it necessary to an acceptable faith, that an actual assent to every thing that is true should take place in our minds. The faith of some may be more just than the faith of others, or it may include in it more articles; but as long as all have nothing but truth ultimately in view, they are all pursuing the same end, and have all one object of zeal and attachment.

You may observe, that I always speak on the supposition that our desire to know God's will is attended with faithful endeavours to discover it. An affection to truth, that does not put us upon doing our best to find it out, can be nothing but a vain pretence; and if, indeed, any one neglects the proper means of informing his judgment, or is criminally hasty and careless in his enquiries, he is so far blameable and guilty. But then I must beg leave to add, that such a person is equally blameable, whether in consequence of such causes he happens to embrace truth or error. One who enquires fairly and carefully before he believes, may happen to be led to reject true doctrines, which he would not have rejected had he continued to swallow implicitly the principles of his education. This I say, though not likely to happen, may happen, and when it does happen, there is in the one case perfect innocence, nay merit, though the rejection of truth has proved the effect of examination; and in the other case there is guilt, though the reception of truth has proved the effect of the neglect of examination. All depends, you should ever remember, on the intention and bent of the heart. Where this is

turned towards truth, wrong opinions will be accepted as if they were right, and on the contrary, where the heart is not thus turned, or a criminal negligence takes place, right opinions will be condemned as if they were false. In this, as in all other instances, the will is accepted for the deed. In the soul where an affection to virtue reigns, God sees every latent virtue that has not yet been called into action, and also in the understanding where the desire of knowing God's will reigns, he sees every part of the system of faith to which, through misapprehension or ignorance, the assent has not been yet given. I wish with all my heart, that those who are disposed to censure others for their mistakes would consider this. They will perhaps say, that it is not involuntary mistake or simple error that they condemn in those who differ from them, but that neglect of the means of better information, and that wrong obstinacy from which those mistakes proceed. Those who talk thus should be certain that their own opinions are not derived from any such causes: for if they are, it is out of doubt, that they are no less guilty than the very person they censure, though their opinions should be perfectly right.

4thly. In connection with what I have now said, it should be remembered, that the very purpose of all religious principles is to produce that temper of mind which I am recommending, and that their worth consists entirely in their tendency to this. Where this temper is found, there the end of religious truth is attained, and therefore nothing more can be essential. As much as there is of a sincere desire to know and to do God's will, in any opinions, so much have they of virtue in them; and, as much as they want of this, so far they are in a moral account entirely insignificant. Seek this, then, in the first place. Seek, above all things, humility, sincerity, piety, and right practice, and then be satisfied that you have reached the very excellence to which all doctrines should bring you; and without which, the most rigid orthodoxy is vanity, and the most extensive faith nothing but a system of notions floating in the head, and leaving the soul miserable.

Again, let us consider on this subject, what a dreadful condition we should be in, were not what I am now insisting upon true. Our acceptance, in this case, would be connected with things entirely out of our power,

and on which our wills could have no influence. It would depend on the extent of our knowledge, and not on the rectitude of our conduct,—on the soundness of our heads, and not on the sincerity of our hearts,—on the accuracy of our judgments, and not on the faithfulness of our endeavours to learn and to practise truth and right. How miserable a state would this be! To be subject to condemnation merely because we have mis-conceived on certain points, or because some of our opinions happen to be wrong,—could any thing be more discouraging? Would it not break all the springs of action in our minds? Would it not render us incapable of ever knowing when we are in a state of safety.

Once more, in order to be further confirmed in the doctrine I am inculcating, let me desire you to look round the world, and to consider the numberless diversities of opinions that prevail among mankind. Can you possibly imagine that God's favour is confined to only one set of these opinions, and that all the rest subject those who hold them to damnation? I know that some, without hesitation, will avow this. There are Christians, who in their

religious exercises, are continually holding up those who maintain opinions different from theirs, as enemies to God, and devoted to destruction. This has even received the sanction of public authority, and in the establishment it is made to be a part of the national devotion, to declare that all who do not receive one particular creed, shall, without doubt, perish everlastingly. But I know that the persons to whom I am now speaking, must detest this uncharitableness. You cannot, I am persuaded, entertain any thought so horrible, as that the little inclosure of your own faith contains in it all goodness, and all that will be saved. Were this true of any religious sect, God's favour would be, indeed, extremely limited, and we could not say with St. Paul "that there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all, is rich to all that call upon him; and that glory, honour, and peace shall be to every one who worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile." Rom. ii. 10, and x. 12.

But what I mean here chiefly to observe is, that experience teaches us that true worth and piety are not confined to any one religious

sect. That person cannot have conversed much with mankind, who has not found that there are good men of all persuasions; that many of those who come nearest to him in sentiments, are very wicked; and, on the contrary, that many of those who differ most widely from him are very worthy. Seldom or ever can we conclude merely from the mode of faith and worship to which a man is attached, what he is in his private character. *In* the church, and *out* of the church, and among Calvinists and Arminians, Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Independents, there are conscientious and excellent men.

Were I to infer from a man's opinions, that he cannot be very zealous for right practice, I should probably be disposed to think so of one who believes *that the eternal happiness or misery of every human being was fixed before he was born by an absolute decree, without any regard to his actions,—that we have no power to do any thing that is good,—that there is no such thing in nature as free agency, or a power of self-dominion; but that every thing we do is the effect of necessary causes, over which we have no control, and that, consequently, every man is just what God made him to be, and does*

what God appoints him to do,—that personal righteousness has nothing in it valuable in the sight of God, and that we must be justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and by faith without works; but experience assures me, that in drawing such a conclusion, I should be very wrong. I see and know, that those who hold these doctrines, are not aware of the consequences of them, and that, like the apostles and first believers, they can drink a deadly thing, and not be hurt by it. I am, therefore, seldom inclined to draw any conclusion from a person's opinions to his character.

You will, perhaps, ask me, on this occasion, are there then no essential doctrines? Or is it indifferent what opinions we hold? I answer, that I have by no means intended to assert this. Saying that there are worthy persons of all persuasions, and that every one who is sincere in his religious profession, shall be accepted, is not the same with saying that it does not signify what our religious profession is, or to what doctrines we give our assent. There is, without doubt, an important difference between doctrines. Some are absurd, and some are reasonable; some are

liable to be abused to licentiousness, and others have a tendency to promote true goodness. It is our duty to reject the former, and, as far as we can, to receive only the latter. There are particular points of faith, and modes of worship, for which I have myself a warm zeal, and to which I think myself bound to adhere, at the expence of all my worldly possessions. He that does not follow what appears to him to be truth and reason, contradicts his conscience, and hazards his own salvation. I do not, therefore, mean to exhort you to any indifference with respect to the part you shall take in religion, or the opinion you shall adopt. Though I insist that our acceptance does not depend on our taking always the right side; yet I insist, also, that it does depend on our taking always that side which appears to us to be right, and not leaving ourselves to be carried away carelessly to a conformity in religion that our hearts disapprove.

As we value God's favour, we must follow our judgments, and worship him only in that way which is most agreeable to our own convictions, striving earnestly for what we apprehend to be true religion, and the genuine

gospel of Christ, free from all human mixtures and impositions. But then we should remember to do this without malevolence or rancour against those whose modes of faith and worship are different from our own. What we judge to be right, we should follow earnestly, but, at the same time, amicably and charitably, never condemning or censuring any of our fellow Christians merely on account of their opinions. Indeed, were the doctrine I have been inculcating, properly impressed on our hearts, this would be unavoidable. Did we believe heartily that God is equally the God of all, in all nations who act up faithfully to the light they enjoy, it would not be possible for us, however attached to our own religious system, to regard with aversion, or to treat with unkindness, any human beings who receive and practise other systems.

But I may have occasion to say more on this presently. I have said, that I have myself a religious faith for which I am zealous; but I do not connect salvation with receiving it,—God forbid that I should. I connect salvation only (as you have learned abundantly from the present discourse) with faithfully endeavouring to discover, and to do God's

will. I see that some of the best men differ from me. My zeal I would temper with candour and love, to those who are attached to contrary principles, and with a perfect readiness to grant them the same liberty that I wish for myself. I would maintain my own principles in such a manner as may shew, that I think myself a fallible creature,—that I have an open and catholic heart, and desire no more than the quiet enjoyment of the rights of private judgment, without molesting others. Charity, and an unrestrained liberty of conscience, I consider as the first objects of all just zeal. These I think of more importance than any modes of faith or worship.

I should now conclude, with desiring your attention to the use of the doctrine I have been delivering, and to some inferences from it. These are many and important, and shall be the subject of my next discourse.

SERMON IV.

MATTHEW vii. 21.

Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into, &c. &c.

IN my last discourse, I represented to you the nature and the evidence of the following truth, "that there is nothing properly fundamental in religion, besides sincerely desiring to know, and faithfully endeavouring to do the will of God." I shall proceed now to desire your attention to the following uses of the doctrine I have endeavoured to explain and inculcate.

1st. It is fitted to administer great comfort to us, amidst the darkness of this world, and the diversity of opinions among our fellow Christians. Were our acceptance to depend on the truth of our opinions, or the orthodoxy of our sentiments, we might well trem-

ble, and say with Peter, *Who then can be saved?* The best and wisest of us, after all our care to inform ourselves, and after all our supplications for light and direction, are mistaken in many points. Some of our most favourite opinions are, probably, wrong, and some of the doctrines which we hold most tenaciously may be false. If there is any one who doubts this, I pity him. Of such a person it is most likely to be true. But let it be true. There is joy in thinking that if we are upright and faithful, it will not obstruct our salvation. God has given no human being a security against error; nor was it possible he should, without making us omniscient. But he has done what is infinitely more desirable; he has given to every one who desires to know, and to do his will, a security of his favour, notwithstanding any mistakes into which he may fall. The man who is right, gains no merit on that account in his sight, if he is so by chance; and the man who is wrong, loses no merit on that account, if he is so involuntarily. He sees even the errors of the diligent and well-meaning inquirer with more approbation than all the sound faith and right notions that are taken up care-

lessly and implicitly from a regard to fashion, custom, education, and human authority.

I can scarcely think of any doctrine more comfortable than this. Amidst the noise of controversy, and the contention of religious sects, it sets a good mind entirely at ease. It enables us to consider the character of the Deity with more affection,—to survey our own state with more complacency, and to pursue the path marked out for us by our own judgment, with more satisfaction and alacrity. Whereas, were what some say of the necessity of receiving their faith—of coming over to their church,—and of the damnableness of heresy and schism,—were this true, our condition would be deplorable. We should be distracted by the menaces of opposite parties, and the Deity would appear to us, in a character the most severe and discouraging.

2dly. The doctrine which I have been inculcating, has a tendency to promote our charity, and to reconcile us to all our fellow-creatures. The chief cause of that animosity which we see in mankind, (and particularly in Christians) against one another, is difference of opinion. They paint to themselves

all who hold tenets, or who practise forms of worship different from their own, in colours the most horrible; and, of course, are led to hate them. But could they be convinced of the truth of what I have been asserting, their aversion would lose its ground, and their benevolent affections would have free scope to exert themselves. Nothing would appear hateful to them, but want of charity, and nothing damnable but a wicked life. They would be ready to embrace all the world, however distinguished into religious sects, with unbounded good will, from a persuasion that no sect enjoys a monopoly of God's favour; and that the inhabitants of the future heavenly state will consist of a great multitude, gathered from all sects, and from every quarter and region of the earth. It is with great concern that I sometimes see a worthy person shewing enmity to some of his fellow Christians, and looking at them with disgust, not because he dislikes their conduct or character, but because he dislikes some of their opinions,—not because they do not worship God according to the best of *their own* judgment, but because they do not worship him according to *his* judgment.

There is scarcely any thing more pitiable than this illiberality and contraction of soul. It makes religion appear very unamiable, and miserably tarnishes a good character. It is the effect of zeal without knowledge, and generally prevails most where there is the most absurdity. Witness, in particular, the Roman Catholic religion,—where is there so much absurdity, and yet where is there so much zeal? Many of the professors of that religion think the person little better than a demon, and consign him to hell, who does not believe that Christ gave his own body with his own hands to his apostles to be eaten by them; and who does not join in worshipping the blessed Virgin, the Pope, and the Host.

Too much of a like temper prevails in many good Protestants, and I am afraid there are several of them who will be not a little shocked at the very Catholicism and the charity I am now recommending. But I can, in some degree, excuse even this narrowness. In many good men, it is chiefly an error in judgment, and a fault of the head more than of the heart. Though always an unhappy imperfection, it is never a crime, except when the effect of pride and malignity; and accom-

panied with a disposition to persecute. Were those conscientious persons, whose characters suffer by it, more enlightened, they would be differently affected, they would lose this zeal for rights, and forms, and notions, and lay great stress upon nothing but the fundamentals of a Christian life. That horror, with which they now view many about them, would cease. Their benevolence would expand itself. They would enjoy more pleasure in their fellow-creatures, and become unspeakably happier. Most ardently do I wish this happiness to all good Christians and virtuous men,—and in order to it, I also wish they were better acquainted with one another. The best remedy for narrowness (next to a correct judgment, and a candid heart) is a free and open intercourse with persons of different sentiments. We are like children wearing different garbs in the middle of a mist. We keep at a distance from one another, and therefore appear to one another like monsters. Did we come nearer to one another, and associate more, our silly prejudices would abate, and we should love one another better.

3dly. The doctrine on which I have been insisting, could it be instiled into every

human heart, would root out of the world all intolerance and persecution, and, consequently, do the greatest service to society. The spring of all persecution is the persuasion that the favour of God depends on the opinions we embrace. Could this persuasion be exterminated, and a conviction established in its room, that every one is acceptable to God who serves him according to the best light he enjoys, persecution would be destroyed in its birth, and no human being would ever wish to lay any restraint on another with respect to the religion he shall chuse and profess: each religious sect would be satisfied with quietly practising its own modes of worship, and (I will beg leave to add) that the civil magistrate would extend his protection equally to all possible subjects of every persuasion, without ever interposing his authority in religious differences. How happy and glorious a state of civil society would this be? But, alas, we know that the state of the world has hitherto been very different. There has always been in the spirit of religious sects, a savageness which has led them to wrong one another, and the business of the civil magistrate has been to foster this destructive spirit, by taking the part of one sect against another;

and employing force to plant an uniformity of faith and worship on the ruins of sincerity and humanity.

What can be more melancholy than this! What can afford a more humiliating proof of the weakness and blindness of human nature? While men allow one another to differ about points of faith, tranquillity and order take place, and religion, by strengthening moral obligations, and promoting benevolent affections, is an unspeakable blessing to the world. But when men come to annex notions of sacredness to particular formularies of faith, and to think it their duty to do all they can to bring men over to the belief of them: When they come to look upon persons who do not receive them with horror, and to consider them as enemies to the Deity, then the most horrid evils begin,—the flames of persecution are kindled,—numberless innocent victims are sacrificed,—and religion becomes a cruel and pernicious superstition.

Read ecclesiastical history, and you will be made thoroughly sensible of the truth of this representation. You will there see religious sects, and the rage for proselytism laying waste the earth. The sword of the magis-

trate turned from its proper direction, and employed, not to keep the peace, but to enforce the decisions of tyrannical priests, and to subdue the schismatic and heretic. The Christian church converted into a field of blood, and the disciples of the blessed Jesus tearing one another to pieces, because not agreed about his person, and nature, and offices. Ecclesiastical history presents us with scenes too tragical and humiliating to be easily borne. It is but little more than a history of the effects of some of the worst passions, worked up to their highest virulence by religious zeal, and of the tumults and wars occasioned by that most infernal of all monsters,—religious bigotry.

Let us Christians carefully guard ourselves here. Let us extirpate from our breasts every tendency to this weakness, and strive to work into our minds a due conviction of the truths I have been delivering. Remember that the religious principles most likely to be true, are those which have the best effects on the temper, and which render you most humble, catholic, and candid. Judge always by this test of your religion, and learn to reject every sentiment that makes you love

mankind less, and leads you to think hardly of your Christian brethren, or that inclines you to any degree of intolerance or uncharitableness. Examine how your heart stands with respect to those who differ most widely from you, and if you find yourselves disposed to be out of humour with them, or to wish the smallest infringement of their liberty, give yourselves no rest till you have brought yourselves to a better temper. Such a disposition may increase to a fixed aversion, and is nothing but the fire of persecution beginning to burn in the heart. It ought, therefore, to be watched particularly, and to be stifled as soon as it appears. If you allow yourselves to be out of humour with another, because he does not believe and worship as you do, you are in the way to think him a miscreant that ought not live. If you think that God is his enemy, the next step will be, that you will be his enemy, and endeavour, perhaps, to bring him to a prison, or a stake.

I can hardly address you on a subject of much greater importance than this. My thoughts have carried me far beyond the limits I at first intended on the present subject, and it is time to come to a conclusion;

and yet I do it with some pain, for I hope that in this assembly there is but little occasion for it.

I cannot help adding one further observation, which I think necessary. I have been recommending to you charity and moderation. There cannot be more important or amiable virtues; but I must warn you that they have their counterfeits. There is a spurious kind of these virtues, consisting in an entire indifference with respect to all religious principles. In avoiding enthusiasm, many fall into a dead languor, and with their bigotry lose their piety. They become less devout, as they become less superstitious, and act as if there was no medium between giving up all religion, and being frantic in religion. Persons of this character are now very common in this nation, and I think of them with particular concern.

Irreligion is as unreasonable as superstition, and it is more inexcusable. The poor bigot who thinks that the whole world is going to damnation, except the few who have the same faith with himself, may be conscientious and worthy; — but the irreligious sceptic, who never worships God or thinks of any future

state, neglects his duty in one of its most capital instances, and must want some of the best affections of the human heart. — The former may be only mistaken; the latter (if he believes there is a God to whom homage is due) must be self-condemned.

Let us, fellow Christians, fly from both these extremes, and while we avoid narrowness take care to retain piety. Let our religion be liberal, and at the same time ardent, remembering that if we serve God faithfully in the way our consciences approve, and with perfect charity to all mankind, integrity and uprightness will preserve us, and we shall soon be made happy in that everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ, into which, not those who call him Lord, Lord, but those only who do the will of his Father, shall enter.

You, all of you, I trust, abhor the fault I have been endeavouring to expose; but there are none who have not the seeds of it in themselves, and we cannot be put too much on our guard. The best things are apt to run into the worst extremes. Religion is the best of all things; but there is no small danger of its running into enthu-

siasm, and being accompanied with an imposing and damning disposition; and when this is the case, it becomes a barbarism of the most horrid kind, and a dreadful pest to society. — Such has been the religion of numberless persons. Such was the religion of the Pharisees among the Jews, and of those abettors of the ancient establishment, concerning whom our Lord said, "that they would think they did God service in killing his apostles." Such is the religion now professed and established in Popish countries, and such also, too much, is the religion of some protestants. Let us study anxiously to avoid this horrid perversion of religion! Instead of being offended with those who belong to a different religious persuasion from our own, let us esteem them as brethren, let us take them into our hearts, and encourage them to follow their own convictions, withdrawing our zeal from rites, and forms, and doctrines, and detesting the hypocrisy of those men who can be more easily reconciled to immorality than heresy, and are more shocked at *believing* wrong than *doing* wrong. Thus, shall we be a credit to religion, and exhibit it to the world as the benign and excellent thing which it really is in itself, and consequently wipe off

in some measure the disgrace under which it lies.

Much has been said and written about fundamentals, and great pains have been taken to settle the nature and the number of them. For my own part, I am unwilling to apply the term fundamental to any controverted doctrine or any speculative opinions. There is properly nothing fundamental except an upright heart. It is not speculation, but practice — not *knowing*, but *doing*, that is most necessary to our acceptance. I do, however, acknowledge that there are fundamental doctrines, but none of the doctrines controverted among sincere enquirers, or of the peculiarities of different sects, can be of this number. Whatever is fundamental is so evident, that it must be universally received.

I will beg leave to exemplify this in the case of the doctrines of Christianity. — That Christ was sent of God to be the Saviour of the world — that he worked miracles — rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven — that he will hereafter appear to judge the world, and that through him mankind will be then raised from death — the wicked punished, and

the virtuous established in a glorious immortality — these are fundamental doctrines of Christianity; — that is, they are so plainly revealed that they are not capable of being denied by any who receive the gospel history. Christians of every name believe them, and are agreed in expecting future salvation and eternal life, not as due to any human merit, but as the gift of God through Jesus Christ. This is a centre in which all the professors of the Gospel meet; and their agreement or common reception of the New Testament as the rule of their faith and practice, and their common hope, through Christ, of a resurrection from death to an endless life of complete happiness, should be a sufficient ground of the most cordial affection and harmony among them, notwithstanding all differences of opinion about the points litigated between Calvinists, Arminians, Unitarians, Socinians, and all the numerous sects into which they are divided. And with respect to those who are not Christians — with respect to Jews, Mahometans, Pagans, and all who have either never heard of Christ, or who through unavoidable mistake reject his mission — I think we ought to extend our Catholicism so far as to believe that no more is required of them than to act up to

the light they enjoy, and that as far as they do this, and are equally virtuous with ourselves, they shall at last be made partakers of equal happiness, through that great Messiah who tasted death for every man.—Thus should we acquire a noble superiority to party prejudices, and feel our hearts reconciled to men of all nations and religions.

I wish I could infuse this liberality into every human soul! But this is infinitely above my feeble powers, and can be accomplished only by the particular providence and grace of God.

Such is the imperfection of the present state, that the best informed judgment will not always preserve good men from an unwarrantable narrowness; and that a part of our duty must consist in making allowances for this weakness in our brethren, and in exercising moderation and charity towards those who want these virtues. The time however, I persuade myself, is coming when a better state of things will take place. Since the Reformation, and particularly within this century, religious sects have been growing more tolerant. The scripture prophecies lead us to

to expect that this amendment in the state of the world will go on, and knowledge continue to increase till a period arrives when spiritual oppression shall entirely cease, and the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord — when persons of opposite persuasions in religion will dwell together in peace, and be no longer disposed to destroy one another; or, in the figurative language of Isaiah, *when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid — the cow and the bear feed together — the lion eat straw like the ox, and they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain.*

May heaven hasten the approach of these happy days, and soon put an end to the evils which have arisen in society from false zeal and religious bigotry.

SERMON V.

ON CONTENTMENT.

PHIL. iv. 2.

I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.

IT is a striking account which St. Paul, in this passage, gives of himself. He had received from the Philippians some contributions for his support. He tells them, that these contributions had given him much pleasure, as testimonies of their affection; intimating, however, at the same time, that he was so practised in contentment, as not to find them necessary. "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last your care of me hath flourished again, wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak

in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound, every where and in all things. I am instructed both to be full, and to be hungry; both to abound, and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding ye have done well, that ye did communicate with my affliction," verse 10, 14.

My present design in discoursing from this passage on the duty of contentment, is to give a summary account of all the principal arguments for it, hoping that by collecting these arguments, and laying them in one view, as far as the limits of a single discourse will allow, a greater impression may be made, and this united force be so felt, as to make it less possible for us to avoid resolving in earnest to practise contentment.

The first arguments I shall mention are those taken from the consideration of our duty to God, and our condition as the subjects of his perfect government. It is he that has fixed our situation, and assigned our lot. Discontent, therefore, is an act of disobedience

to him. It implies a censure of his providence, and an opposition to his authority. Its language is, "I am hardly dealt with,—God shall not reign over me,—I will not consent to his determinations, or submit to his will." How shocking is such language in such creatures of frailty,—such children of the dust,—such ignorant and helpless beings as we are? Has not he who created the world, a right to govern it? Has not he who made us what we are, a right to dispose of us as he sees best? Has not he who has given us all our enjoyments, a right to continue or withdraw them as he pleases?

But this is a consideration that will acquire more force, if we will add the recollection that all the determinations of God's providence are under the direction of unerring and perfect reason. It is not possible that he should dispose of us amiss, or permit us to suffer for a moment under any real grievance. No pain, which (considered in its reference to his administration) is improper, can exist. No advantage or relief, which rectitude requires him to grant, can be denied us. No event can take place, which he, as the supreme arbiter of all events, ought to have excluded;

and this is just as certain as that he is a righteous and benevolent being. Nothing can place the unreasonableness of discontent in a stronger light than these considerations. They shew, that it is the folly of repining at what is best,—the impiety of charging the Deity with doing wrong,—the baseness of desiring that perfect order that governs nature, should be broken. The course of things is right, beyond the possibility of correction. The constitution of the universe is just what the best informed benevolence can wish it to be. Nothing can happen, that is not under the best superintendency, or that does not derive itself either from the appointment or the permission of infinite goodness; and were we wise enough, we should mind nothing but exhibiting in our own conduct that righteousness which governs the world, take up our rest in God at all times, under a full conviction that the hairs of our head are numbered; that not a sparrow falls to the ground without him, and that the final issue of events will be the production of the greatest possible good. If, then, you have any regard to the duty you owe to God,—any faith in his providence,—any reverence for his authority,—any just sense of your situation amidst his

works; or any of that loyalty of heart to his administration which is your duty and your dignity, you will be satisfied with your lot, and practise contentment.

All is well,—well for ourselves in particular, if we are virtuous. But whether virtuous or vicious, well for the world at large, and in the great sum of events. We find ourselves kindly provided for,—everlasting happiness is offered to our acquisition. Neither capricious chance nor a blind fate have any thing to do in the direction of our affairs. We see an attention displayed in the arrangement of dead matter that excites our wonder, and exceeds our comprehension. This assures us that there can be no such thing as negligence in an arrangement of infinitely more consequence. I mean, in the arrangement of the lots of reasonable beings, and the adjustment of events among them. In such a situation, to be mal-contents, or not even religious, is to be monsters of ignorance and ingratitude. In short, the duty of contentment is not an obligation to break our minds to the sway of irresistible power, or the necessity of submitting our wills to a lot which is hard but unalterable; though, were even this the case,

contentment would be still a duty, for what in such a case would be more proper, than to make the best of a hard lot, not capable of being mended, by yielding to it as quietly as possible? But this, I say, is not the contentment we are to practise. Our circumstances are unspeakably different. All that is incumbent upon us is to wait quietly for a glorious issue to present events,—to consent that the best ends should be brought about by the best means, and to fall in with the measures employed by infinite wisdom and goodness, to produce a happiness that will be infinite and everlasting, and in which our own happiness will be included, if we do not reject it, by making ourselves unworthy of it.

These are the fundamental reasons for contentment. But there are many other collateral reasons which ought to be mentioned, and which I will now enumerate. And here I will first observe, that the following reasoning on this subject often relieves and tranquillizes my mind. I ask myself whether I do not receive more good than evil in life, and whether therefore my existence is not a blessing to me? In answer to this question I always find myself ready to acknowledge, that

my enjoyments far exceed my sufferings — that my life is a valuable gift, and that were it put to my option, whether I would exist as I am, or not exist, I should eagerly prefer the former: — and, I believe, that there is scarcely a human creature who would not make the same acknowledgement, were he properly informed, and did not labour under a morbid and delusive melancholy. Happy then, in some measure, we feel ourselves, and if we make complaints, it must be because our existence is not attended with a greater overbalance of enjoyments. But what can be more absurd or perverse? If this is a just reason for being discontented, it is in the nature of the thing impossible to satisfy us. Such a reason for discontent must remain in every state of existence; for let its enjoyments be ever so great, there will be a possibility of a greater.

A person (let us suppose) in a low situation finds upon comparing his hours of health and sickness, of ease and pain, the former to predominate, and that his condition, though low and attended with inconveniences, has an excess of gratification in it, which makes him chuse to retain it rather than be struck

out of being. He is, therefore, a gainer by his existence, and has reason to be thankful for it. If then he complains, it must be because he is not placed in a higher situation, and is not a greater gainer by his existence. Suppose this granted him—the same cause of complaint will remain; for there will be still higher situations; and this would be the case were he raised ever so high; for still higher there would be—and though placed at the top of worldly grandeur and felicity, he might murmur, because he had been made a man, and not an angel,—or though made an angel, he might murmur because he had not been made an arch-angel.

You see, then, that discontent goes upon a principle that would level the creation, and sow uneasiness among all the inferior ranks of beings. There must be distinctions and subordinations without end and without limits in the universe. There must be, amidst God's works, a lowest as well as a highest, and if the lowest have reason for being dissatisfied, all the intermediate beings have equal reason, and there would be nothing in the creation but murmurs, jealousy, and misery. In short, the language of discontent is, "I will be at

the summit of created existence — I will be satisfied with no happiness short of the highest which divine power can bestow — I will accept no advantages while there are greater to be possessed." — A wiser and more just manner of determining would be the following. Living and thinking as I now do, notwithstanding the sufferings to which I am subject, I prefer, to the loss of life, thought, and conciousness. I therefore bless God for giving me myself. If I am dissatisfied, it must be, not because God is not good to me, but because he is not better — not because I am not happy, but because I am not happier. But this is presumption and arrogance. There is no being, however exalted, that may not on the same ground be dissatisfied. I might, without injustice, have had nothing; I ought therefore to rest contented with any thing. Oh thou Author of my being, deal with me as seems best in thy sight. Having a right to nothing, I claim nothing. Deriving all from mere bounty, I pretend not to prescribe how much I shall have. I know that under thy government I cannot be finally a sufferer, or meet with any treatment that will not be kind as well as just. Give me what portion of good thou pleasest, and though I believe

this to be infinite, and that thou hast intended me for an endless life beyond the grave, yet should I at last find myself deceived in this, I will bless thee for the present life, and esteem any little that shall be granted me not a wrong, but a favour.

In the next place let me, on the present subject, direct your attention to our unworthiness and guilt. We have all of us sinned, and broken God's laws. We have departed from our duty, and by many inexcusable transgressions exposed ourselves to the displeasure of our Maker. And is it for such offenders to be out of humour, if they are not pleased in all things? Is it for sinners to complain, if they do not swim in plenty, or if they often fall into troubles and meet with disappointment? Should they not, even in the worst circumstances, rather accuse and reproach themselves, than exclaim against providence? "Wherefore doth a living man complain — a man for the punishment of his sins?" It is in truth scarcely possible that discontent should enter the mind of a person, who is duly sensible of the guilt he has contracted, and the moral evil by which he has stained himself?

Again, let me desire you to consider the state of the world about you, and the design and nature of the present state. I have observed that the present life is a valuable gift, and that we possess in it advantages and enjoyments, which make our existence upon the whole a happy existence. But it should be remembered, that this happiness is not an *unmixed* happiness, or a clear sum of enjoyment, without any pains or sufferings. On the contrary, it is (as I have intimated) only an excess of pleasure above pain, or an overbalance of enjoyment. From the happiness allotted us, there are deductions and abatements. Wisdom and goodness require these abatements, and without them it is certain that the absolute quantity of our happiness would have been less than it is. We ought, therefore, thankfully to submit to them, and to endeavour to co-operate with our Maker, by using them for the purpose he intended; —that is, for the purpose of securing and increasing the quantity of happiness granted us. From the cottage up to the throne,—from feeble infancy to decrepid old age, there are various pains and uneasinesses which it is neither fit nor possible that we should escape. There is no condition of life perfectly happy.

There are no enjoyments or pleasures perfectly pure, and free from every alloy. The nature of the present state does not admit of this, and we should learn to take our state as it is. On a sea that would stagnate were there no wind or waves, is it reasonable to expect, or even to wish, never to be tossed? In a situation where showers of arrows are flying round us, can we reckon upon being never wounded? Amidst the general crosses and sufferings of our race, can we look for an exemption? Think, whenever discouraged by disappointments, vexed by calumny, or depressed by sickness, that you are only suffering a common lot. Look about you, and survey the condition of others. Is there a human being that enjoys an uniform happiness, whose hours pass on always without disturbance,—who never is tried by any sorrows, never feels any distress, or suffers any pangs? Could you find such a human being, you would find (upon making a just estimate of his state) that his exemption was a calamity to him, and that the singularity of his case only made him less a gainer by his existence. But no such case can be found. All are sufferers in some way or other. Many labour under great calamities, and some under calamities, with which our

petty evils will bear no comparison. Did we attend more to this, and instead of envying those above us, turn our eyes to the millions below us, we should be always more disposed to praise than complaint. When you are suffering under any pain, or your temper is fretted by any misfortune, think of those who at the same time are just reduced by a bankruptcy, from opulence and comfort to penury and want — or of those who are then burning in a fever, rotting in a dungeon, or perishing in a shipwreck.

Such reflections as these will tend more to quiet you, if you add the reflection that these greater sufferers may not be more undeserving than yourselves—some of them may be much better. The wisest and the best have often been obliged to struggle with dreadful evils, and they may not have exceeded us more in the excellence of their characters, than in their difficulties and trials. You may easily recollect many instances of this. What a sufferer was Christ himself? How was he vilified and insulted—and at last nailed to the cross? What right have we to better treatment than others? Are we oppressed, are we injured, are we in pain? So are many more in the

world, so were many of the best men that ever lived,—so was Christ himself, our glorious deliverer and Saviour.

The discontented man forgets what he is, and where he is. He forgets this life to be a state of trial and discipline. He forgets that he is travelling to a country beyond the grave; and that in his journey he must expect, sometimes, to meet with bad roads and inclement weather.

We are, I will suppose, calumniated. But how can we wonder at this, in a world where there are so many lawless tongues, and so many contending interests and prejudices, which render men incapable of judging candidly and impartially of one another. A consciousness of our own integrity should be sufficient to arm us against the attacks of malevolence and bigotry. When men censure us unjustly, we should consider that it is not us they censure, but a creature of their own imaginations. We are, perhaps, crossed in our undertakings; but should we not reflect, that all human schemes are precarious in their issue, and ought we not to have reckoned upon this when we engaged in them? What

then does the disappointment we feel on such occasions prove, but our own folly. Were we truly wise, we could never be disappointed; for we should place our happiness in doing right, and not in any thing over which we have no power. We are, perhaps, poor; but how little is the difference between the poor and the rich, as to real enjoyment. A poor man, who supports himself by honest industry, and whose body is healthy, his sleep sound, and his mind easy, is unspeakably happier than the pampered voluptuary, who is continually feeding his lusts, and rioting in unlawful pleasures. If his raiment is coarse, it answers all the ends of raiment as well as the gaudiest. If he lives on a plain diet, it is more conducive to health, and, consequently, to enjoyment, than the most luxurious. He has few wants and few incumbrances, and *no flatterers*. In short, he is free from the numberless cares and temptations to which riches expose men, and which are continually distracting the ambitious and the voluptuous.

Death, perhaps, has torn from us a valuable friend, or a dear relative, who was the comfort and the delight of our lives, and the recollection may be continually wringing our

hearts. Such calamities are unavoidable in this state of mortality; and resignation to the authority that appoints them, is the best lesson we can learn. Repining under them, is the same absurdity with repining because a river will flow, or a stone fall to the ground. What is brittle will break. What is mortal must die. Our friends are blessings lent us for a season, and when taken from us, instead of saying we have lost them, we should say, we have returned them. We are all bound the same way. We are all doomed to the same end. But we may hope to meet again in a better state. Blessed, then, be the name of the Lord.

Let me further here direct your thoughts to the short duration of this life, compared with that for which we are ultimately intended. Be our sorrows or our troubles what they will, they cannot last long. Death will soon end them, and amaze our souls with scenes now unknown and incomprehensible by us. Let us prepare for that time, and mind less every thing temporal. We are on the threshold of eternity. Let this quiet the turbulence of our passions, and awe our minds into moderation, with respect to every world-

ly interest. Indeed, could we with due faith, attend to the transitoriness of this life, and compare it properly with those boundless ages which we have before us, and through which we are to exist, every mortal scene would vanish, every mortal care would be lost, no worldly emoluments would be able to extort a single wish, or worldly evils a single groan from us. Only one business would appear important. But to proceed to one further argument for contentment. Let me desire you to consider the happiness contentment will bring with it, and how miserable the want of it will make you. A discontented man has always an unpossessed something which corrodes and leavens all his enjoyments, however valuable or numerous. It does not signify how much he has. *Enough* with him is always *more*, and by pursuing that unreasonably and eagerly, he often suffers the loss of every thing.

A man in trade, is, perhaps, in possession of a fortune, which, could he but think it enough, would make him easy and respectable through life. But he wishes to be still richer. He strikes out into new paths. He becomes an adventurer and speculator. He

hazards all, in order to get more. He runs himself into difficulties, and at last, involves in one common ruin, himself, his family, his friends, and numberless innocent, but too credulous sufferers. Thus does the want of contentment lead men into temptations and a snare, which pierce them through with many sorrows, and drown them in perdition. Many are those who are contented with a little, but few with a great deal. How happy, compared with such persons, is he who lies quiet in the vale of life, free from worldly ambition, secure against the storms which he sees dashing the hopes of others, and anxious about nothing but being good, and doing good, and preparing for immortality. The life of man, (our Lord tells us) that is, the true happiness of life, does not consist in the abundance of what he possesses. Godliness with contentment (St. Paul tells us) is the chief gain. *We brought nothing with us into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Having, then, food and raiment, let us be therewith content.* This important virtue will sweeten every blessing, throw new charms on the face of nature, heighten the relish of prosperity, lighten the strokes of adversity, soften grief, and give us the full share of bliss

intended for us here below. It is not possible to describe properly its favourable influence on our interest. On the contrary, discontent withers every enjoyment, darkens nature, turns plenty into poverty, increases trouble, and inflames the wounds inflicted by misfortune. If we have not contentment, it signifies little what we have. Power, pomp, titles, and all that we see the children of this world so eagerly courting, will only render us more deeply and illustriously wretched.

You have now heard enough to recommend contentment to you: Will you not, then, resolve to practise it? How mad is it to pursue the phantoms of ambition and avarice, while this best remedy for pain, this surest defence against trouble, this sovereign cordial in the cup of life, this choicest of heaven's blessings, is neglected? How melancholy is it to observe so many wailing under imaginary evils, restless in the midst of affluence, contending (like birds beating themselves against their cages) with the necessary course of things, and living in vexation and tumult; whereas, would they but embrace this heavenly virtue, and rest themselves on the wisdom and benignity of God's universal government, every real evil

would shrink, every imaginary one would vanish, every clamorous passion would be silenced, and every anxiety, except about doing our duty, would be annihilated. As you love yourselves then, Christians, or the Being who made you, study to acquire this virtue. Forget not the reasons for it, which have now been represented to you. Think that, having no claim to existence, you might without injustice have now been nothing. Think of your own unworthiness and sinfulness. Think of the less happy conditions of multitudes about you. Think how momentary every thing in this world is. Think of the misery of discontent. Look to eternity. Trust in God, and whatever state of affliction you may be in, commit yourselves to him, being assured that all is rightly ordered under his government, and remember that he has said, "he will never leave nor forsake you." Thus in the exercise of patience, contentment, and hope, will you prove yourselves his dutiful children; and his peace, which passeth all understanding, will ever keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.

SERMON VI.

ON THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

JEREMIAH xxiii, 24.

Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.

MY design from these words is to discourse to you on the omnipresence of the Deity. The descriptions which are given us in the sacred writings of this attribute of the Deity are very striking. "*He filleth,*" my text says, "*heaven and earth.*" In other passages we are told, "*that the heavens, and heaven of heavens cannot contain him,—that there is no darkness or shadow of death that can hide us from him,—that his eyes are in every place beholding the evil and the good—that all things are naked and open to him,—that there is not any creature that is not mani-*

fest in his sight, and that in him we live, and move, and have our being." But the most striking representation of this attribute is in the 139th Psalm from the 7th to the 12th verse. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up to heaven thou art there. If I make my bed in hell thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me; yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

In considering this subject I shall first give you an account of the proofs of God's omnipresence; 2dly, I shall offer some observations on the manner of it; and, lastly, mention the influence which it ought to have on our tempers and conduct.

The proofs of God's omnipresence are taken chiefly from the following considerations: first, It is implied in his being the cause and author of all things. It would be absurd to suppose that he can be excluded from any

part of that universe to which he has given existence. His presence must be commensurate to his works, and these most probably are boundless in extent. As there is no medium between saying that God created from eternity, and saying that an eternity passed before he created, so there is no medium between saying that the creation is boundless, and saying that there is an infinity of space in which nothing exists, and, consequently, that the effects of divine power and goodness actually displayed are nothing to those not displayed. And since all that is finite is nothing to what is infinite, this is the same with saying that the good done by divine goodness is nothing to that which might have been done, and that perfect benevolence has been from eternity an inactive and dormant principle. We may then reckon that there are worlds, and systems of worlds, which occupy immensity and to which God as the Maker of all things must be present. I am sensible that this is a truth, which, when we closely consider it, overwhelms and confounds us. But it is forced upon us by some of our clearest ideas, and I do not see how we can avoid the acknowledgment of it without running into contradictions. But setting it aside; let us

at present satisfy ourselves with considering creation as limited. The argument now suggested, proves that God is present to the whole of it, and this is sufficient to all practical purposes. It is necessary to add, that his presence must not only be thus co-extensive with his works, but that they owe their preservation to his presence; or, in other words, that he is not only present, but actively present in every part of nature, and that were he for an instant to suspend his agency, the whole frame of the world would fall to pieces, and all beings expire.

His power, continually exerted, is the source of all the efficacy in nature, the first mover in every motion, and the life of all that lives. This is implied in the nature of matter as an inert substance, destitute of active powers, and no less capable of changing its own state of motion or rest, than of changing its own figure. This property of matter is the foundation of all sound philosophy. It is laid down as the first principle, by the first and greatest of all philosophers*. On this principle he builds his demonstrations, and from

* Sir Isaac Newton.

it he has deduced those discoveries by which the world has lately been so much enlightened; and if it is a just principle, as it undoubtedly is, it follows certainly that matter can of itself do nothing; and that all the laws by which the order of the world is maintained, must be derived from a cause not material. That law of gravitation in particular which makes all bodies near the earth to descend to the earth, and which keeps the moon and the planets in their orbits, must be resolved ultimately into the never-ceasing energy of the Maker of our system; just as the motion of every wheel in a clock or watch depends ultimately on the constant action of the spring or the weight. The same observation is applicable to all the other laws of the material world, and to all the powers that operate in it. The self-motion of matter cannot produce those laws and powers, because it is entirely passive; and were it even otherwise, it would be impossible for the different parts of it to conform themselves in such a manner to their different situations, and to act so much in concert with one another, as to produce those laws and powers. This, I say, would be impossible, even on the supposition that matter is an active substance, and capable of moving itself. The velocity,

for instance, and the force with which the law of gravity makes any given particle of matter to move, depends on the number and the situation of other particles at the distance of millions of miles from it; and since it is not present to those other particles, it cannot possibly, were it even intelligent as well as active, be capable of governing itself by their number and situation, so as, by any energy of its own, to be the cause of the motion communicated to it. There is, therefore, an animating principle distinct from matter, and superior to it, and present to every atom of it, which is continually acting upon it, which preserves corporeal nature, and on whose universal influence its order and existence depend.

Let us here pause awhile, and think what a view this account gives us of the omnipresence of the Deity. It was the hand of the Deity that first formed the sun and other stars, and it is in consequence of that energy of his which pervades all things that they are continually communicating light and heat to numberless worlds. It was his power that projected the planets in their orbits, and that is always holding them in by the force of gravity. It is by

Him that the moon performs its revolutions and raises the ocean in its course. It is from Him that storms and earthquakes derive their dreadful force. It is He that gives all the elements their different qualities and uses, and that is continually forming the bodies of plants and animals. Even a stone never falls to the ground without Him. There are, it is true, numberless second causes, but they all depend on Him; and He is, in every event that falls under our notice, the first cause. There are, in the frame of the universe, wheels within wheels, beyond our utmost comprehension. But the power that keeps them always in motion, and the spring in which they all terminate, is his agency. Those laws, by which nature is conducted and maintained, are only his power acting every where according to established rules. He is not only the original giver, but the constant preserver of life and motion to every creature. By Him our pulse beats, and our hearts dilate and contract. By Him we hear, we speak, we feel, and see. The mechanism of our bodies, and the laws of union between them and our souls, are perfect mysteries to us. We know not how the impressions on our senses produce the ideas accompanying them; how

memory is performed by the instrumentality of the brain, or how our wills instantaneously move our members; but we know that the unremitting influence of the Deity is the primary cause. The whole of what we are depends absolutely upon Him; and that not merely in the sense that he made us what we are, and therefore can destroy us when He pleases; but in the sense that the exertion of his power through our whole duration, is necessary to our continuing what we are. Our ruin would be the immediate consequence of his leaving us a moment to ourselves. It is, in short, nothing to say that God is always present with us. He is, likewise, always working within and without us. In all beings He is inmost. The life of those lives, and the soul of those ouls; the acting principle in all material energies; the light by which we see light, and the ineffable and incomprehensible spirit that moves, connects, and sustains the vast creation.

With what propriety, then, is it said in my text, that He fills heaven and earth, and, by St. Paul, that "of Him, and to Him, and through Him, are all things." His instant care and omnipresent influence we are perpetually

feeling. He is the parent of bliss, the supporter of nature; of Him the whole world is full; by Him the whole world subsists, and to Him be all glory and praise!

The reasoning I have now used, goes only to prove that the presence of the Deity extends as far as his works, and that, supposing these bounded, it does not prove the strict immensity of his nature, or his presence to the whole infinity of space. The arguments which demonstrate this, are more abstruse; but they are also more decisive, and will assist us in gaining more correct and just ideas of this attribute. I will, therefore, hope for your attention while I endeavour briefly to represent them.

1st. It is implied in the idea of an unoriginated Being, that there can be nothing to limit Him. All limitation requires a limiting cause, and therefore cannot be applicable to that Being who is the cause of all causes. This argument proves the infinity of all the perfections of the Deity. Whatever He is, He must be perfectly so; all imperfection implying contingency and dependence. But this reasoning is applicable with particular clear-

ness to his omnipresence. Were his existence determined to one place, rather than to another, it must have been so determined by some prior cause; and, consequently, He could not have been the first cause.

2dly. That necessity by which the Deity exists, can have no relation to one place more than to another. It must be the same every where that it is any where. This is perfectly exemplified in the case of abstract and necessary truths. All such truths are equally truths at all times, and in all places; and were they not so, they would not be necessary but contingent truths. God exists necessarily in the same sense; and it is no less a contradiction to suppose his presence confined within any limits, than it is to suppose that it is not true every where that the whole is greater than a part. But it is proper that I should just observe further, what is most of all decisive and satisfactory in this instance, that the infinity itself of space is nothing but the infinity of the divine nature. There is, in my opinion, no room for entertaining a reasonable doubt about this. Infinite duration and infinite space exist necessarily. It is a contradiction to suppose them not to exist.

They are the foundation of all other existence. They are, therefore, without doubt, the necessary nature of the Deity. They are his eternity and immensity. It is impossible that any consideration should give us so striking a view of the presence of God with us as this does. He is the time and place in which we exist; and to think of flying from his presence, is the very same as to think of existing no where, and being nothing. He presents himself to us in every moment. He meets us in every thought. He is the power by which we act, the vital energy by which we live, and the very possibility of our being. In a word, he is so near us, that (strange as it may seem) for this very reason, we do not perceive him. He is so familiar to us, and intimate with us, that we overlook him; and so unwilling are we to believe that he is really so near us as he is, that we are apt to run ourselves into contradiction in order to avoid acknowledging it. I will just mention a proof of this. God is present with us in time and place, and, I will add, in all abstract truth and possibles; and such is their reality, that no reality can be conceived without them. They are eternal, immutable, self-existent, and infinite. It might be expected that such

properties should immediately force every man to acknowledge in them the divine nature. But, instead of this, many learned men have asserted that they have no existence. I cannot think of a proof more mortifying of the imperfection of the human understanding. Thus it is, because every thing, the Deity becomes nothing to us.

But I have, I fear, entered much too far into these disquisitions. In what follows of the present discourse, I will endeavour to keep to what is more obvious and practical. I proposed, at the beginning of this discourse, after proving God's omnipresence, to offer some observations on the manner of it. On this subject I would desire you to consider:

1st. That God is to be conceived as present with us, in all we think, as well as in all we do. The motives of our actions, our most secret views and purposes, and the inmost recesses of our hearts, lie naked before Him. We are apt to think ourselves private within the inclosure of our own breasts; but even here all is open to Him. He observes every thought in its source, every sentiment as it is formed, every wish as it rises.

2dly. He is present with us not only by his inspection, but by his influence. Were his presence no more than a presence of notice, our annihilation would be the immediate consequence. His hand is always working to preserve us, and to keep up the springs of life and motion within us. He is present with the whole world by an influence which is instant, all pervading, and all sustaining.

3dly. He is present with us, not only by his notice and his influence, but by his sense. It is true, in a strict sense, that we are apt to believe that he is one with our natures. His sense penetrates ours. It is, as I have already said, no less in Him than by Him that we exist. In other words, He is present with us not virtually only, but substantially. He is with us in every moment that measures our duration, and in every necessary truth that employs our understanding. We see Him in every view we take of places and distances. We are conscious of Him in every idea that passes through our minds. We feel Him in every effort we make, in every breath we draw, and in every object that gives us either pain or pleasure; and the reason we do not more

recognize Him, is the mistake and inattention which I have just mentioned.

4thly. It follows, from hence, that He is present with us in a manner in which no other being can be present with us. It is a presence more real, more close, more intimate, and more necessary. The considerations I have suggested plainly prove this. But we might have known it without the aid of any such considerations. For what can be more likely, than that the presence of the Creator to the creature,—of the first mind to the mind derived from it, must be different from any other, and of a nearer and closer nature? Once more, it is proper to observe, that God is present alike in all places. His sense penetrates alike all beings. It is here in you and me. It is equally in every inhabitant of this earth, in all creatures, in all worlds, in all space. The only difference is, that to some beings He manifests more of his presence than to others; or, that in some places the effects of his presence are more felt. The scriptures tell us, that "He is in heaven;" but we must not understand this literally. As to his sensible presence, He is as much on earth as he is in heaven. The difference, as I have just

said, is only in the representation and display of it. In heaven, and among angels and superior beings, He is more recognized, and his goodness is exhibited with a brighter lustre. But the scripture language, when it commands us to conceive of God as being in heaven, means often, not so much as this. It is intended chiefly to express (by a phraseology accommodated to our conceptions) the supreme dominion of the Deity, and his sovereign authority over all beings. Thus, the expression that Christ is gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, certainly signifies no more than that he is exalted to dominion under God; or, as it is elsewhere expressed, that all power is given Him in heaven and earth.

The practical improvement of this subject is very obvious, and I shall represent it in the following inferences.

1st. Since God is equally present every where, we ought not to imagine that our worship of Him can be more acceptable in one place than in another. A wretched superstition of this kind has prevailed among mankind, which we ought carefully to avoid, re-

membering that there is no consideration that can draw Him to any building we can erect for Him, or any spot on which we may not with equal advantage offer to Him our prayers. A sigh or a whisper addressed to Him in the fields, or in our closets, is no less regarded by Him, than if it was offered in a church, and accompanied with ever so much pomp and solemnity. To this purpose St. Paul preached to the Athenians, Acts, xvii. 22, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. God, that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, for He is not far from every one of us, for it is in Him we live and move and have our beings." Were there any place in which it can be justly said, that God is more present than another, it is the breast of a virtuous man. This is the temple that we ought to erect for Him. This is the only habitation in which He has any particular delight, or to which He can give any preference.

2dly. Since God is the only being that is present with us in the manner I have described, there can be no other being who is the proper object of our prayers. It is, in-

deed, probable that we may be objects of the inspection of many other invisible and spiritual beings, whose presence is extensive in proportion to the superiority of their natures. But we do not know enough of them to warrant any invocation of them. There is but one Being concerning whom we are sure that He is in such a manner present with us, whenever we utter any devout wishes, as to be capable of hearing and answering them; and, consequently, there is but one Being to whom we ought to offer them. All worship directed to other Beings is idolatry.

3dly. The consideration of the constant and intimate presence of the Deity with us, ought to encourage us in our addresses to him. He is, as you have seen, one with our natures, and as much present with us as we are with ourselves; and He is withal our benevolent parent, and therefore no pious wish of our hearts, no virtuous breathings of our minds, no desire of bliss that can be directed to Him, can escape his notice, or fail of being properly attended to. It is impossible that any greater encouragement can be given us to pour out our souls before Him at all times with hope and confidence.

4thly. A reverential fear should continually possess us, since God is always with us. In every place we should feel as the patriarch Jacob did when he said of Bethel, *Surely God is in this place; how dreadful is this place!* Could we enter properly into the considerations I have suggested, this would necessarily be their effect. Our minds would be open to constant awe. The ground, wherever we trod, would be the same to us with consecrated ground, and every corner to which we could go would be converted into a sanctuary.

5thly. The presence of God with us should deter us from sin. This, as the scriptures tell us, is the abominable thing that his soul hateth. Let us then avoid it in his presence. Let no sinister view,—let no base desire or evil passion shew itself under his eye. Think what the effect must be of incurring his disapprobation. Think that He sustains you,—that on his influence all your pleasures and all your pains depend, and that He has an absolute command over all your powers; and think, at the same time, that wherever He is, there He is with all his attributes of perfect rectitude, wisdom immaculate, and justice inflexible, and that, consequently, every wrong

thought indulged in his presence, and much more every criminal action done before Him, must (by offering Him an affront and an insult) have a tendency to bring upon you all that is dreadful.

6thly. The presence of God with us should support us in the performance of our duty, and quicken us in a virtuous course. When employed in any acts of piety or charity, when conscious of any honest purpose or effort, the reflection on a present Deity should animate us and render us superior to all difficulties, knowing that He, the sovereign of nature, stands by us and is pleased with us, and that at last (whatever may happen to us) we must be distinguished by Him from the workers of iniquity, and made infinitely happy. Let us suppose, that we were every moment open to the notice of all our fellow-creatures, and that no thought or wish could rise within us without their knowledge and observation. It is easy to conceive how careful this would render us of our thoughts and actions. But the truth is, that we are open to a notice which is infinitely more awful, and infinitely more important than the notice of the whole world. Should not this render us unspeakably more

careful of our thoughts and actions. It is possible, indeed, that there may be a crowd of superior beings who are attentive to us, and ready to salute us with their praises whenever we make a virtuous effort, — but what is this to that inspection of the Supreme Being which we are sure of, and that favour which we may expect from him as far as he sees us virtuous and worthy? Let this engage us to exert ourselves to the utmost in every thing that is praiseworthy. There is no ambition that is not poor, that is not trivial, that is not contemptible compared with this. If God loves us, all wise and good Beings must love us, and the whole world will be made to contribute to our happiness.

Once more, the consideration of God's presence with us should encourage and comfort us under every pain and trouble. A present Deity is a present friend, and a present helper in every time of need. He sees our sufferings and He made us to be happy, and therefore we may be assured that He would not permit any of our sufferings for a moment, were they not proper to be permitted. To say no more. There exists an eternal wisdom and benevolence, which, in union with al-

mighty power, pervades all things, governs all things, and presides over all events. No improper sufferings, therefore, can find admittance into nature, and all must end well. Let us take shelter in this truth, amidst all the trials of this life. It is indeed the most encouraging and the most grateful of all truths.

SERMON VII.

ON SELF-EXAMINATION.

PSALM cxxxix. 23. 24.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

THIS psalm begins with a striking description of the omnipresence of the Deity, and concludes with the prayer now read. The consideration that God is always intimately present with us, and with all beings, or as the Psalmist expresses himself, *that he knows our down-sitting and uprising, and understandeth our thoughts afar off, that he besets us before and behind, and is acquainted with all our ways:* This consideration, I say, has a particular tendency to engage us to pray to him in the words of my text, " that he would

search us and know our hearts—that he would try us and know our thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in us," or, in other words, that he would assist us in discovering our own characters and shew us wherein we do amiss.

My present design from these words is to discourse to you on the duty of self-examination. Were I more anxious to entertain and amuse than to edify my hearers, I might, perhaps, chuse to decline such a subject, or at least avoid treating it in that plain and serious manner which I propose; for there are few subjects to which many persons care less to set their thoughts. But whether agreeable or disagreeable, it is without doubt a subject of the last importance. Little good can be done to men by public admonition till they can be persuaded to examine themselves, and to apply what they hear to their own cases. General exhortations to repentance and virtue must be useless, as far as those to whom they are directed think (for want of due examination) that they are already safe and virtuous, and therefore have no need of them. Let us, therefore, now for a few minutes employ our thoughts in the work of self-examination; and, in order to find out the true state of our characters, let us consider what answer

we can give to such enquiries as the following: 1st. We should ask ourselves, whether we have ever had any serious thoughts about our own condition? I am afraid, that by putting this single question to themselves, many persons may immediately determine that they have no great reason to be pleased with themselves. Multitudes seem to indulge an indifference with respect to every thing religious; they go on from week to week, in carelessness and levity, without feeling any solicitude about their present characters and future hopes. Let us then ask ourselves, have we ever thought in earnest about being truly virtuous? have we ever felt ourselves alarmed, and taken up seriously the enquiry, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Is it possible that those can have repented of sin, who have never been under any convictions of it?—that those can inherit eternal life who do not make it an object of their attention; or that, contrary to what takes place in this world, the enjoyments and honours of another world are to be secured without preparing ourselves for them? In short, have we ever employed ourselves in the duty of self-examination? If not, let us consider whether it is possible that we should have acquired true goodness. In order to

this, it is necessary that we should have amended our faults, and in order to the amendment of our faults, it is necessary there should be a discovery of them, and there can be no discovery of them without examination. The like is to be said of any virtues we may have wanted—of any good we may have left undone, or any duty we may have improperly neglected. We have all of us many deficiences, and it is examination alone can inform us what they are, and how far they are, or are not inexcusable and dangerous. But further let us ask ourselves, whether in the common course of our conduct we intend virtue as our end? Certain it is, that no one can be virtuous without designing it. But some there are who do not seem to go so far in virtue as even this. They are led almost entirely by views of interest, by the humour of the moment, or by natural temper, without ever setting before themselves, the whole of good, the obligations of morality, the good of mankind, and the acquisition of future bliss, as the guides and ends of their conduct. But let us reckon the contrary to be true. Let us suppose that the practice of religious virtue is really meant. It is obvious that this is only the first necessary step to saving goodness.

We must not only mean, but execute. We must not only intend and resolve, but persevere and overcome, and make religious virtue the principal concern and business of our lives. Let us then ask ourselves, whether we do this? whether we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? whether we take more pains to be honest than to be rich, and prefer a consciousness of integrity to any temporal advantages? These are the leading points in our characters, and they ought to be the principal objects of self-examination. Do we give diligence to secure God's acceptance? Do we shake off sloth, and press forward with ardour towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Or, though we mean virtue, and look forwards to eternity, do we sleep and loiter, and content ourselves with languid wishes, low attainments, and feeble efforts that are seldom effectual? Do we think ourselves good because we have some good in us, and possess perhaps even some good qualities? So far we are to be honoured, but it ought not to satisfy us. The most vicious men have some good in them. Libertines and profligates have often amiable qualities. It is necessary that we should have prevailing goodness. The virtuous principle

must be the reigning principle in our hearts. It is not enough that we love truth and right; but we must love them more than any thing that can come in competition with them. It is not enough that our attendance on the duties of piety is constant, our faith sincere, and our religious profession strict; but our profession, our faith, and religious services must give efficacy to our good resolutions, deliver us from evil habits, and produce those fruits of righteousness which are necessary to adorn a religious character.

Let us, therefore, examine ourselves on these points. Let us consider in what direction our thoughts generally run, and what it is that chiefly occupies them. Let us consider whether, in every transaction of business, our attention is turned, not merely to what is most profitable, but also to what is most fair, most equitable, and most honourable. The thoughts of a man of pleasure, are always taking a direction to pleasure; of a covetous man to his treasures; of an ambitious man to his honours; and the considerations that influence them must, in all their undertakings, have their tendency to those ends. The like is true of a virtuous and reli-

gious man. His heart is engaged in his duty as a moral agent, and an immortal being, and it is this that chiefly employs his thoughts, and determines his conduct. I am led from hence, to mention to you two points, which, when employed in self-examination, require our particular notice. These are 1st. The purity of our motives; and, 2dly. The universality of our obedience.

1st. The purity of our motives should be particularly enquired into. You well know that actions may have all the form of virtue without any of its realities. Works of charity may be nothing but ostentation and religious zeal; nothing but an attachment to opinions taken up blindly and capriciously. Honesty may be the effect of worldly policy; and achievements the mot brilliant, the effect of a passion for fame. Repentance may proceed more from a sorrow for losses sustained, or disgrace incurred, than from a hatred of vice as such, and shame for having done wrong.

Humility and benevolence are two of the most amiable virtues. But the former may be an abject servility of spirit, and the latter

a kind instinct destitute of all moral merit. Courage may be fool-hardiness, patience a constitutional insensibility, and firmness of mind a blameable obstinacy. A constant attendance on the public duties of religion may be derived from a regard to fashion, to custom, or to some secular advantages; and the most vigorous exertions of preachers may be only a display of talents, and a pursuit of popularity. In a word, there are scarcely any virtues which have not their counterfeits; or any actions naturally good which may not be the effect of indirect vice; nor is it by any means easy to enumerate all the ways in which, by concealed principles producing false appearances, we are liable to be deceived in estimating our own virtues. Let us then search diligently into the springs of action within us, and labour to purify them as much as possible. So far as vain-glory, self-love, the fear of punishment, or any dispositions entirely instinctive influence us, so far we want the proper root of genuine virtue; nothing being morally good, which does not flow from an inward relish for virtue on its own account, and a regard to the will of God, and the happiness of our fellow-creatures.

Such, indeed, are the different casts of mind, turns of temper, and varieties of good, bad, and indifferent motives which are continually influencing us, that it is often very difficult to distinguish them, so as to be able to determine how far one or the other of them has been concerned in producing our conduct; and this is, therefore, the most intricate part of the duty of self-examination. But it is a necessary part, and there are rules for assisting us in it, which may lessen its difficulty. A distinct account of these rules would be very useful; but I can only give a specimen of them in the following instances. A man, who in any case prefers *being* good to *seeming* good, and is private in his charities and devotions, may be sure that so far he is sincerely good, and does not act from ostentation. A person who is naturally vehement, if he is tractable; a passionate man, if he is gentle; a timorous man, if he is steady; a man naturally sour, if he is kind and obliging, may be sure, that his virtue is not owing to a happy favourableness of constitution.

The second point which I have mentioned as particularly requiring our attention, in examining ourselves, is the universality of our

obedience. This is a necessary test of the purity of our motives. He that discharges his duty from right views, will endeavour to discharge his whole duty. He that is truly virtuous, must possess a zeal for all virtue, nor can he possibly satisfy himself with any separation of the duties of morality from one another, or any selection of virtues. Genuine goodness is always uniform and consistent; and it cannot be so if, while some parts of virtue are practised, others are neglected; for the idea of virtue is the same in all its parts. He that hath said, "thou shalt not steal," hath said also, "thou shalt not speak evil of thy neighbour, thou shalt not tell lies, thou shalt not get drunk, thou shalt not take the name of God in vain;" and he that hath said "thou shalt pray to God in private and in public," hath also said "thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, thou shalt do good to them that hate thee, thou shalt be fair in all thy dealings, thou shalt be temperate, chaste, and faithful." We must, then, if we would acquire a just knowledge of ourselves, bear this in mind, and examine whether we have an impartial respect to all God's commandments; whether we possess, though not

a perfect, yet an entire character of virtue; whether there is any bosom vice that we practise; any criminal passion that we indulge; any important duty that we neglect.

I might now go on to mention some other heads of self-examination, and when employed in this way, to urge the necessity of enquiring how far our hearts are engaged in our duty, by the delight and ardour we feel in well-doing, what time we devote every day to the exercise of good affections before God, and what endeavours we are using to grow better, and to extirpate from our characters every remaining defect and imperfection. But chusing to confine myself to a single discourse on this subject, I will only further beg leave to remind you of the importance of the duty on which I am insisting, and the danger of self-deceit. Is it not self-evident, that the knowledge most important to us is the knowledge, whether the governor of the world is pleased or displeased with us?—the knowledge whether we possess that righteousness of character which is the chief glory of every reasonable being, and even of God himself; and, consequently, the knowledge whether we are likely to rise or to sink

under the divine government, and to be happy for ever, or lost for ever? What pains can be too great to answer such enquiries? What infatuation possesses us, that we can, in this instance, act contrary to all the principles of common sense, and all the dictates of self-love and providence? If Christ is coming to judge the world, to give a triumph to virtue, and to punish and exterminate vice, should we not consider how we stand with respect to a period so awful; and what (should death now seize us) our fate would then be? What pains do men take in their worldly concerns to settle questions of law and property? What study is sometimes employed to discover the sense of an ancient writing, or to solve a frivolous problem? How melancholy is it that we can be inattentive to a question which involves our highest interests, and about which, on the most sceptical principles, it becomes us to be most inquisitive? How contemptible is it to study every thing but ourselves, and to be inquisitive about every thing but our own final destination? Self-enquiry is the proper employment of a reasonable being. The capacity of reflecting on ourselves, and of looking forwards to eternity, is one of the distinguishing privileges of our

natures; and it is shameful to suffer it to lie dormant, and to go on regardless of what is passing within our own breasts, and what may happen to us in the vast and astonishing eternity that lies before us. Think of the advantages attending self-knowledge. It leads directly to virtue and to glory. When we know ourselves, the raptures of hope will take possession of our minds, should we find that though imperfect, we are prevailingly virtuous, and have forsaken every wrong practice. When we know ourselves, we shall know where to direct our exertions, how to avoid disappointment, what is requisite to make us happy, what parts of our characters are deficient, what faults we have to mend, what virtues require our cultivation, what God thinks of us, and in what state of security or danger we are placed. Such knowledge is infinitely desirable; but it cannot be obtained without an anxious and diligent self-examination. Self-deceit is very common, and it may (if not carefully guarded against) prove fatal. There is a partiality to ourselves, and an unwillingness to look stedfastly at our own characters, which are extremely hostile to our true interests; and which, if indulged, must render us deaf to all warnings, and bring upon us,

while we are saying to ourselves peace and safety, sudden destruction. In our spiritual concerns, we often resemble decaying tradesmen, who fearing a disagreeable discovery, and chusing to be deceived, will not examine their accounts. The consequence of which always is, that bad grows worse, till at last ruin becomes unavoidable.

Let us, fellow christians, avoid this folly. Let us consider that our ignorance of our own state will make it, if bad, incapable of a remedy, and expose us to a more dreadful condemnation. Let us remember, that to be deceived here, is to lose the favour of God, and the kingdom of heaven. Let us remember further, that a time is near, when God himself will call us to account, and judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. Is it not proper that we should anticipate this time by now calling ourselves to account, and looking over our own secret history? My inclinations lead me to mention some rules for the performance of the duty I am inculcating; but I am afraid of being too tedious, and therefore shall only just intimate, that in order to perform it profitably and successfully, we should

perform it frequently, impartially, and devoutly.

First, we should examine ourselves frequently. No day should be suffered to pass without some self-enquiry. In the morning we should resolve to be upon our guard through the following day; to speak evil of no one, to be contented, patient, and good tempered; and in every transaction to maintain an invariable regard to truth and right. In the evening, we should recollect how far we have kept the resolutions of the morning; what indiscretions we may have fallen into in the course of the day; what good we have done; what temptations we have resisted; or what sins we have committed: thus shall we be advancing continually from strength to strength in a virtuous course, and find ourselves at the great day of account numbered among the faithful, and made partakers of an honour and happiness, which are not now to be conceived of.

Again, we should examine ourselves impartially. When thus engaged, we should divest ourselves, as far as possible, of all biasses which may lead us astray, and particu-

larly of that pride of heart and partiality to ourselves which I have before mentioned, remembering the reason we have for being jealous of ourselves, and apprehending danger from self-deceit.

Finally, we should examine ourselves devoutly. I mean as in the presence of that Being who knows our hearts, and with prayer to him that he would assist us in this work, and not suffer us to fall into any dangerous mistake. In this way let us be always watching our conduct, and sifting our inclinations and sentiments. If we have hitherto neglected this duty, our case must be such as requires an immediate application to it. Our minds must lie waste, and delay may take away all hope. Let us, therefore, determine now, that we will take the first opportunity to retire from the world, to examine our characters, to ponder our steps, and to charge our hearts with a sense of the necessity of casting off sloth, and making religious virtue, as it is our first good, our first pursuit. Let us resolve, that whatever others do, we will no longer remain strangers to ourselves, or suffer the momentary concerns of this polluted world to divert our attention from that which alone will bring us comfort at last.

Let us implore that Being, who sees the inmost recesses of our minds, and to whose eyes all things are naked and open, that he would shew us ourselves; save us from negligence and inconsideration; that he would *search us, and know our hearts; try us, and know our ways; and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting.*

SERMON VIII.

ON HAVING OUR REJOICING IN OURSELVES.

GALAT. vi. 4.

But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

MY present purpose does not require me to enter into any critical examination of the meaning of these words as they stand in the context. It is evident they imply that the best foundation of every man's happiness is *himself;* that is, his own temper and character, and not any thing external to him. This is a most important truth, and I shall therefore take occasion from these words, 1st. To represent to you what it is in ourselves that is the proper foundation of our

happiness. 2dly. To explain the particular advantages that will arise from founding our happiness on the internal causes I shall enumerate.

Let us first consider, what it is in ourselves that is the proper foundation of our happiness; and it may be observed here in general, that it must be grounded on the good order of the mind, and of its powers and affections. There is a state of our powers and affections, which is properly their orderly state; and that state must likewise be their natural and right state:—and their natural and right state must be that which is most favourable to the enjoyment and satisfaction in which happiness consists. It must be that which the Author of our minds intended. It implies wisdom and vigour, and order and harmony, and therefore it cannot but be the greatest folly to expect to be happy out of it. Confusion and discord and disease in a society necessarily destroy its happiness. Their natures are the same in a character, and therefore their effect must be the same.

But to be more particular: Let me desire you to consider, that the supremacy of con-

science and the subjection of the passions are absolutely necessary to internal happiness. Human nature is endowed with a variety of passions and instincts. They are all by the Author of our natures placed under the direction of reason, and intended to be subject to it. This is the proper order and economy of human nature, and when this order is preserved, when the passions keep their proper places, and perform their proper functions without encroaching on the authority of that reflecting faculty which gives man his denomination and distinction; then, and then only, does all go on well within him. Then only does a man possess the superiority to a brute, and preserve his rank and dignity. Then only is he truly a rational being, and capable of enjoying blessings suited to his nature, and which can be no where found but under the dominion of conscience. It is common for men when they gratify their passions in opposition to their reason, to consider themselves as following their nature. But there cannot be a more absurd sentiment. The nature of man should certainly take its denomination, not from its instinctive and brutal part, but from its higher and intellectual part,—from that part which is immortal

and divine, from that moral faculty to which it belongs to superintend and control all the inferior powers, and which has been justly called the Vicegerent of the Deity within us. It is therefore he who follows his conscience that follows his nature. To gratify our reason at the expence of our passions is giving our natures their highest gratification; but to gratify our passions at the expence of our reason, is making ourselves the objects of our own aversion, and giving our natures a mortal stab; for (as some of the ancient philosophers have observed) racks and tortures are not so contrary to the nature of man as moral evil.

Such therefore is that internal state which constitutes internal happiness. It includes particularly the following causes of happiness: first of all, the prevalence of the mild and generous affections. There is a manifest difference between the several affections of our minds in respect of their effect on our happiness. Some of them produce an immediate pleasure, and are by their nature agreeable and delightful feelings. Others are by their natures internal disturbances and pains. Of the former kind are gratitude,

benevolence, and compassion, and all the social and public affections. Of the latter are resentment, envy, and malice, and most of the private and narrow affections. A mind where the former prevail, has within itself a fund of agreeable sensations. A grateful and ingenuous and friendly disposition, so far as it forms a character, is so much enjoyment and satisfaction. On the contrary, the selfish and narrow affections, (envy, pride, revenge, and malevolence) are so much misery introduced into a character. The mind that is under this power is so far a stranger to peace and quietness and comfort.

Again, self-approbation is another cause of internal happiness included in the supremacy of conscience. "Let a man (says St. Paul in my text) prove his own work;" or (as some think the original words ought to be translated) "let a man *approve* his own work, *and then shall he have rejoicing in himself.*" "This (says the apostle in another place) is our rejoicing, even the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, and not with fleshly wisdom, we have had our conversation in the world." Nothing is of so much consequence to us, as to keep upon

good terms with our own reflections. If that power within us which is appointed to be the guide and judge of our conduct condemn us, great must be our distress; but if it applaud us, we have a never-failing source of comfort. A self approving heart, a soul conscious of upright views, must be the seat of serenity and delight. Agreeable to a common maxim, "a good conscience is a perpetual feast." It gives a feeling of satisfaction, and at the same time of security under God's government, that is preferable to all the treasures of the world. We are a race of frail creatures, just brought into being in the midst of a scene of which we see only enough to assure us that it is vast and incomprehensible. In this situation it is not possible for us to determine what particular measures the scheme of the divine government requires, or what events may arise as it advances and unfolds itself. But we know (and it is sufficient to all good purposes of our present existence to know) that whether we can see how or not, all is rightly directed; and also that when we follow our consciences, we go in that path which has been marked out to us by our Maker, and therefore in the path which, whatever happens, must be most free from danger, and

most likely to end well; and the consciousness of this must be to a considerate man a support and a cordial in all circumstances. In connection with this, it is proper to mention confidence in the Deity, contentment under his government, and resignation to his will. It is needless to represent to you the importance of these dispositions to our happiness. The belief that the sovereign power which produced the universe is united to perfect wisdom and goodness, is above all things consoling and beautifying. It has a tendency to banish from our breasts all disquieting cares, to cheer us under every trouble, and to engage us to commit ourselves joyfully and triumphantly to Providence. Without this belief every thing looks dark, and the world becomes a desart, where we can find nothing that we can contemplate without suspicion and perplexity. But with it, and with that acquiescence and confidence which it must inspire, all nature acquires a lustre, every suspicion vanishes, every event appears a part of a plan for producing universal good, every thing hostile takes a friendly form. In every storm, a voice is heard whispering peace, and our minds, resting themselves on the benevolence of the divine government, submit and

rejoice. What sources of happiness can be like these? and what a pity is it that there should be any who through an unhappy scepticism are incapable of feeling it?

I will only further mention the hope that springs up in a well-regulated mind, as another cause of its happiness. We are all of us sensible of the influence of hope on our enjoyments. It is one of the most important ingredients in the cup of life. When it departs, the heart breaks, despair takes its place, and all enjoyment is lost. But there is no such hope as that I have now in view. It is the hope of the favour of the Sovereign of the World, and of the future effects of it in a happy eternity. This is a hope which we owe chiefly to that unspeakable gift of God to dying men, for which we cannot be sufficiently thankful. I mean the Christian revelation. "By the resurrection of Christ (St. Peter tells us) we have been begotten again to a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for us in heaven." "This is the record (St. John says) that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." This is in truth an unbounded and

ravishing hope; nor is it possible that any person who attends to it, and brings himself properly under its influence, should be otherwise than happy. It makes the lot of humanity glorious, and furnishes us as it were with wings, by which we are lifted up on high, and enabled to look down on this vain world by seeing even beyond the grave; and to consider ourselves as superior beings, the future associates of angels, citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

This then is the happiness which a man who approves his own work enjoys, and the seat of which is in himself alone; and if you would form a just idea of it, collect together the particulars which I have recited, and think of it as the result of a commanding reason and obedient passions, of an applauding conscience and an honest heart, of a mind satisfied with itself, and possessing health, order, and independence; of a temper formed by the generous affections, of contentment, resignation, trust in God, a sense of his love, the belief that all is well under his government, and the hope of surviving death, and of being raised up hereafter through the power

of Christ to a life of unchangeable and ever-increasing happiness. Can you conceive of any blessings equal to these, or of any happiness equal to that which they must produce?

In order to enable ourselves to conceive how great this happiness is, let us recollect the following advantages attending it: 1st. Let us consider how firm and stable its foundations are. It makes a part of our consciousness, and is one with our natures, and therefore while we retain our consciousness, and continue to be ourselves, we must enjoy it. Being derived from a due order and influence among our inward powers, and grounded on truth and reason, and the constitution of our minds, it cannot be fluctuating and precarious like other happiness, carrying it with us in our bosoms, it goes with us every where, into solitude and company, into the desart and the city, into houses of mourning as well as of feasting, into the dark as well as the bright walks of life, smoothing every rugged path, throwing a reviving light over every object, and giving additional pleasure to all innocent gratifications. This happiness is in reality best enjoyed in solitude; for there we

are most left to our own reflections, and most at liberty to derive from them the pleasures they are capable of communicating: there we can attend most to our own state and destination and hopes, and consequently feel most of the joy which in a well-ordered mind they must inspire. This proves, that the happiness I am speaking of is independent of external events. It is placed above the reach of chance, and those vicissitudes and crosses with which human life abounds. Being rooted in our natures, and springing from what we are, and not from what we have; from our characters and tempers, and not from our possessions, it cannot be affected by what happens to our possessions, or destroyed by any accidents. Such a man may be poor, or he may be sick, or he may be disappointed in his undertakings, and yet be still happy, because his chief good-will still remains with him in the regularity of his passions, the applauses of his conscience, the firmness of his trust in the universal parent, and the raptures of his hopes. The persecution of enemies, the desertion of friends, the attacks of malice, the violence of bigotry, the wars of elements, and even the ravages of death will leave this happiness a copious stream which will be

still flowing when the springs of inferior joy are dried up, and will go on to flow till it becomes that fullness of joy, and those pleasures for evermore which are at the right hand of God. Think not, fellow Christians, that I am now making a visionary representation to you. The reality of it has been often experienced. May we so live and act as to experience it, and find (as many good men have done) our last days our best days, and our last comforts our greatest comforts!

But further, it is a particular recommendation of this happiness, that it is a pure happiness. The passions are foul springs of happiness. When gratified in the best manner (that is, when gratified naturally and moderately) they have a debasing and enervating tendency. There is a sense of shame annexed to them, and there is no one who, if he is uncorrupted, can value himself upon the pleasures they afford, or who can wish to be thought to place his happiness in them. The contrary is true of the pleasures I am describing. They are pure and refined. We have a perception of dignity in them, and there is no man who does not reckon them

(as far as he enjoys them) his principal honour and glory.

Once more, I would observe that the internal happiness on which I have been discoursing, is not only more stable, more constant, more independent, and more pure than any other happiness, but also of a higher nature. It is as much higher in its nature, as what is intellectual and moral is higher than what is corporeal and sensual,—the reasonable part of us higher than the animal part,—the soul superior to the body,—and a man superior to a beast. The sources of it are the same with the sources of the happiness of angels. And it may be observed that this happiness, consisting in a conformity to reason, in benevolent dispositions, in acting like God, and in an assimilation of our natures to his nature, is truly and properly a sacred and divine happiness.

It is indeed the only happiness we ought to seek with any earnestness, and we have seen where we are to seek it. It is to be found no where but in ourselves. Here then let us look for it. Let us not wander among external objects in quest of what can exist

only in our own bosoms. Let us govern our passions, mend our tempers, do our duty, trust in God, and look to another world. If this is not the foundation of our happiness, it will not much signify what external advantages we enjoy. An internal passion will debilitate and sicken all our powers. We may be rich or great, or learned, but we shall not be happy; for without peace *within*, there can be no pleasure; without a mind satisfied with itself, there can be no enjoyment; without the hope of God's favour, there can be no true satisfaction. The turbulence of passion, the reproaches of conscience, and the forebodings of guilt must throw a cloud over every object, and embitter every advantage. Let us then study to guard our minds against the intrusion of these enemies. Let us withdraw our ideas of good from the vanities that engage the attention of the children of this world, and fix them to those blessings which defy the power of time and chance. Those blessings which will make our own reflections a paradise to us; those blessings which make angels happy; those blessings which are accompanied with the smiles of heaven, and will be a happy foretaste of eternal joy.

What has been said teaches us to exalt our ideas of virtue. All the happiness I have been explaining is included in this one word. Let us then practise virtue, and remember that an essential part of virtue is *religion.* I wish it was in my power here to give a just representation of the happiness of a virtuous man, as it may be deduced from the observations in this discourse. He is, as Solomon says, "satisfied from himself," or as St. Paul says in my text, "he has his rejoicing in himself." What a distinction and superiority does this give him! What a privilege is it, not to be obliged to search for the happiness which all desire in creatures, and the distracting pursuits of the ambitious and voluptuous, but to find it in God and our own hearts. Imagine you see the man who is thus happy retiring into solitude, and there shutting out the noise of this world, collecting his thoughts, and giving himself up to meditation and devotion. Conceive of his pleasure when he thinks that (however frail and imperfect) he is sincere in his attachment to the interest of virtue, and not conscious of any indulged guilt; and that therefore he has reason to hope for the approbation of that best as well as greatest of all

Beings, who remembers we are dust, and will make allowances for infirmities against which we strive, and which are not inconsistent with prevailing integrity. With what joy and wonder does he direct his mind to that Being, and consider him as intimately present with him; the life by which he lives, the power by which he acts, the reason by which he understands, and the very time and place in which he exists. What gratitude and triumph does he feel when he reflects that he is the offspring of infinite goodness, and that he has been brought forth into an immense universe in which, with innumerable worlds of fellow-creatures, he is intended for infinite happiness! How in particular does he rejoice in that assurance of mercy to sinful men which has been given in the gospel, and in that Deliverer and Saviour who has given him a victory over death, and will hereafter "change his vile body that it may be like unto his own glorious body, by that mighty power by which he is able to subdue all things to himself." He looks into himself; and though he finds many follies to lament, he finds at the same time reason to believe that he has complied with the terms of favour required of him. He finds an honest and faithful heart, the

power of sin broken, though not annihilated, and ardent wishes to improve. He looks back on past life, and recollects many exertions in the service of God and his fellow-creatures, many successful struggles in a virtuous course, many acts of generosity and self-denial, many irregularities of temper corrected, and many graces carefully cherished and cultivated. He looks forward beyond the grave, and there he sees that better country into which he is soon to enter; and where a government of perfect and permanent peace and virtue is to be erected. See him returning from his closet to the world, and suppose him in prosperity. His superiority to the world gives him the truest enjoyment of it. In health and affluence every pleasure is doubled to him by a contented mind, and an easy conscience. The moderation of his desires and expectations increases his relish for common blessings; and not having placed his happiness in them, (that lying safe within the inclosure of his own breast,) he can lose them without disappointment or regret. Place him in adversity. Conscious rectitude, the force of good principles, and a reliance on the wisdom of God's government, enable him to bear it with forti-

tude, and render him, under the pressure of outward evils, firm and cheerful. Bring him to his last struggles. Place him on a sick and dying bed. See him even now (as far as the nature of his distemper will allow) calm and satisfied. Faith and hope support and elevate him. He expects a triumph over death through the great Redeemer. He falls asleep, but awakes immediately, shakes off the dust of the grave, welcomes the return of light and life, and rises new-made and glorious, to die no more.

What a contrast to this representation is the state of a wicked man, as wretched in himself as the good man is happy; his heaven-born mind laid waste and ravaged,—tormented by shame and self-reproach,—made to soar with angels, but groveling among worms,—God his enemy,—in life unhappy; undone by death. Here a nuisance; hereafter a victim of divine justice. And while the good man carries a heaven within him now, which will terminate in exalted and endless felicity beyond the grave; he carries a hell within him now, which will terminate in a more dreadful hell hereafter.

SERMON IX.

ON THE IGNORANCE OF MAN, AND THE PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF IT.

JOB, viii. 9.

For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing.

MY design from these words is to lay before you a general representation of the imperfection of our knowledge; and in order to be sensible of this, let us first consider what we know of ourselves. This is the subject we are most intimate with, and which therefore we ought to understand best; but we are indeed in a state of very great ignorance about it. We carry about with us bodies curiously made; but we cannot see far into their inward frame and constitution. We often feel them out of order without

being able to tell the cause, or knowing how to remove it. We experience the operation of many powers and faculties, but understand not what they are, or how they operate. We find that our wills instantaneously produce motion in our members; but when we endeavour to account for this, we are entirely lost. The connection, likewise, between certain impressions on our organs of sense, and the sensations they produce,—the original springs of animal life within us; the laws of union between the soul and the body, and the nature of death, and the particular state into which it puts us: these and many other particulars relating to our own beings are absolutely incomprehensible to us. We are indeed often disputing about some of them, but this only proves more strongly our darkness; and our best way in general is to take the frame of our natures as we find it, without being very anxious about discovering the hidden springs which actuate it. There is not in short any circumstance of our existence, or any one of our bodily or our mental powers, which has not in it something to perplex us; and one of the greates mysteries to man is *man*.

But from ourselves let us advance to the objects that surround us, and consider what we know of this earth and its constitution and furniture. Almost all that we see of things is their outsides. The substance or essence of every object is unintelligible to us. The internal fabrick of the bodies around us, on which their essential properties depend, is concealed from us. We cannot discern a millionth part of the art and workmanship in the lowest plant. Nay, there is not a particle of dust which has not enough in it to puzzle and confound the highest human understanding. We dwell on this earth, but we know little of it. There are many parts of it which our discoveries have not reached, and all below its surface is necessarily hidden from us. We observe the phœnomena of nature around us, but know not whence they come, or whither they go. We see no more than a link or two in the immense chain of causes and effects. There is not a single effect which we can trace to its primary cause. There is not one event of which we can say that we are acquainted with all its connections and issues. But suppose we were acquainted with the whole of this earth, and with the causes of all that happens in it, even this would be nothing.

For what is this earth to the whole solar system? How little do we know of the sun and of the worlds which move round him? What is light, and how does the sun dart it forth on all sides with such inconceivable velocity? How are the planets furnished and peopled? What are the comets, and for what particular purpose were they created?

But further; suppose we were acquainted with the whole solar system, still we should know next to nothing; for what is the system of the sun to the system of the universe? A thorough comprehension of the one would help us but a little way towards comprehending the other. There are numberless systems besides this in which our lot is cast, many of them probably more grand and beautiful. It is not possible for us to imagine what brighter scenes enlighten other worlds. What wonderful effects of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness are displayed in the remoter districts of the creation; or what new plans of nature, and new scenes of being and bliss may take place in the boundless regions of the universe. But to proceed yet further: suppose we could take in the complete prospect of God's works, and were as well acquainted

with the whole extent of created existence as we can be with any single object in it, even this would be comparatively nothing; for still there would remain unknown an infinity of abstract truths and possibles. It cannot be thought without the greatest absurdity, that Almighty power has exhausted itself, or that the whole of truth and existence are actually exhibited in the present universe. There must therefore remain an infinity behind. Though we had a perfect knowledge of the immense universe, and of its whole history; though we were acquainted with the whole scale of being as it rises in endless gradation above us, and with all created existence, it would be still true that we knew nothing compared with what remained possible to be known.

It may be worth while for us in this place to attend particularly to our ignorance of the plan and conduct of divine providence in the government of the universe. That the course of events is under the best direction, or in other words, that there is a perfect order of administration in nature; this in general we may know, and it is enough to comfort and support us amidst all trials and difficulties.

But we cannot say wherein consists the fitness of many particular dispensations of providence. We see little or nothing of the vast scheme of the divine administration. There is a depth of wisdom in all God's ways, which we are incapable of tracing, and though *judgment and justice are the habitations of his throne, yet clouds and darkness are round about him.* There are many circumstances in the present condition of man which appear to us strange and unaccountable. The origin of evil, for instance, is a point which in all ages has perplexed human reason. In the midst of demonstrations of infinite skill and benevolence, difficulties continually occur to us; nor is there a single view of nature and providence to be taken, which is not sufficient to convince a considerate person that he is in the highest degree an incompetent judge of them.

But in the last place, let us on this occasion carry our thoughts to the Deity himself, and consider what we know of Him. It is nothing to say, that our ideas of Him are imperfect and inadequate. They are undoubtedly in many particulars very erroneous. His nature is absolutely unfathomable to us, and in the

contemplations of it we see ourselves lost. What astonishing objects are self-existence, absolute eternity, and immensity, and infinite power and intelligence? We know these to be attributes of the Deity; but when we revolve them in our minds, they amaze and stun us; and in some respects we are scarcely able to free our notions of them from contradictions. The difficulties however which we here meet with are by no means to be wondered at. I have already observed that we cannot comprehend the essence of the lowest inanimate object; how incomprehensible then must the essence of the ever-blessed Deity be? The minutest effect in the creation is above our faculties; how much above them must the Cause himself be? We are overpowered and confounded by the view of God's perfections as they appear to us by reflection from his works; how is it possible that we should be able to bear the direct and immediate view of them as they exist in his nature? Did we thoroughly comprehend all created existence, the Creator himself would still be incomprehensible. There would still remain in His necessary and boundless intelligence an infinity to which our understandings could not reach.

You have now seen in some measure, how great human ignorance is. Whether we consider ourselves, the objects most familiar to us, this earth, the wide universe, or the providence and perfections of God, we see ourselves involved in impenetrable darkness. The comparison of what we know of the world, with what we do not know of it, is enough to strike us with the deepest conviction of almost total ignorance. But if we will compare what we know with the whole extent of possible as well as actual existence, or with the infinity of abstract truth and the Divine perfections, we shall find it to be strictly true, that our knowledge bears just the same proportion to our ignorance that an instant does to eternity, or a point to immensity.

After this representation of our ignorance, let me desire you in the next place to attend a little to the foundation or reason of it. There is no occasion for enlarging much here. That imperfection of our knowledge which I have described is plainly owing to the following causes:

1st. The narrowness of our faculties. It might be sufficient to say on this head, that

our capacities of knowledge are finite; for it appears from what has been said, that this alone lays the foundation of infinite ignorance. But to say this of man would be very frivolous; for it would be saying no more than is necessarily true of the highest created intelligence. We appear to be very low in the rank of intelligences, and it must therefore be expected that our powers of perception should be weak, and our inlets of knowledge scanty, in proportion to this our low rank. So weak indeed are our intellectual powers, and so imperfect our reason, that we see men continually imposed upon by every specious appearance that offers itself; mistaking shadows for realities, and embracing the grossest absurdities as the most important and sacred truths.

But 2dly. Another reason of our ignorance is the lateness of our existence. We are but of yesterday. We are children lately introduced into the world, and therefore we think and speak like children. We are not yet of any standing in the creation. We have not had time to see much of it, and on this account it is impossible that we should know much of it. Our faculties are capable of un-

speakable improvement; but they are now in the first step of their progress, and consequently frail, and weak, and tender. The light of reason is as it were but just kindled within us, and therefore must be dim and faint.

Again, let us consider how disadvantageous our situation is for observing nature and acquiring knowledge. We are confined to a point of this earth, which itself is but a point compared with the rest of the creation. It is not possible for us to go abroad to visit any of the remoter regions of nature. We therefore see nothing of the world, and for this reason can know nothing of it. The universe is wide, and vast beyond any thing we can imagine. The scheme of the divine government is of unlimited extent. It is made of numberless parts, and reaches through a long succession of ages. Of such a scheme what can we be capable of knowing? What can such short-sighted creatures, imprisoned in flesh, and shut up within the narrowest limits of time and place,—what can children, whose faculties are scarcely opened, and who very lately were nothing,—what can such beings know of the order of the immense

creation, of the plan of eternal Providence, or of the unsearchable ways and attributes of the Deity?

If we attend to these observations, we must perceive that we cannot but be in a state of the greatest ignorance; and we should remember, that though some of them may in a lower degree be applied to all created intelgences, yet they are in a more particular manner applicable to ourselves. Other beings have more perfect senses and higher powers; they are of longer standing in the creation, and have seen more of the order of the world, and the proceedings of Providence; and therefore they must be better acquainted with truth, and with nature, and with Providence. It is not indeed possible for us to conceive how great and knowing and perfect some of God's reasonable creatures may be. What, particularly, must those creatures be who are the first of God's productions, who from the beginning of time to the present moment (that is, for numberless ages) have been observing the course of the Divine government, and continually improving? Such beings probably exceed us unspeakably more than an archangel exceeds a reptile in the dust. They

must have acquired a knowledge of infinity with respect to us. But still even *they* are nothing in respect of the Deity, and they may be said to know nothing compared with the whole extent of infinite truth and possibility. Though now improved to a degree that is entirely incomprehensible to us, they have still room for further infinite improvements; and they will have the same room after the yet higher improvements of numberless ages to come. What reflections are these? What a tendency have they to reduce us to nothing in our own esteem?

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I shall now conclude this discourse with the following application of what I have said. There are several important uses to which we may apply the account I have given of our ignorance. In the first place, it is obvious that it ought to teach us the profoundest humility. There is nothing that we are more apt to be proud of than our understanding; but we could not be capable of this, did we see our ignorance as it is, or duly consider how little we know, and how inconsiderable we are, compared with other reasonable beings. There is not a more ridiculous object in nature than a proud man, or a poor blind creature who is

but of yesterday vain of his understanding, swelled with a conceit of his superior wisdom, and fancying himself capable of judging of the works and ways of the Deity. Let us endeavour to be wise enough to avoid this monstrous folly. The highest point of knowledge to which we can attain is the knowledge of our ignorance. This has been the effect of true knowledge wherever it has been found. Socrates was the wisest man in the heathen world. But he tells us that he had been pronounced by an oracle wiser than other men, only because he knew better his own ignorance. The further we proceed in real improvement, the larger prospect we have of the boundless fields of science, and of the occasion and room there is for improvement. The deeper we look, the more we descry of the fathomless abyss of truth. The more we study the constitution of nature, and the dispensations of Providence, the more we must be convinced that they are above our faculties, and that the causes of the most familiar appearances are unknown to us. None, therefore, but shallow minds can indulge pride; nor is there a stronger proof that a man has no reason to be proud, than his disposition to be so. A set of beings, born and

educated in a cave, might be led to think that what they see in this one little cell was the whole world. But take them out to the light of day, and shew them the wide-spread earth and the spacious firmament, and they will be immediately struck with a sense of their own littleness and ignorance. True wisdom has an effect on the mind similar to this. While in the state of common men or of half-thinkers, we are apt to believe that we can account for every thing, and that within the circle of our own affairs is comprehended in a manner the whole creation. But as soon as the light of true wisdom enters our minds, and our views are enlarged, we feel our own nothingness and darkness. We are forced to despise ourselves for giving way to pride, and to fall down in astonishment at the depth of the divine councils, and the vastness of the creation.

I am led from hence to observe 2dly, that the account I have given of our ignorance may be of particular use in answering many objections against Providence, and in reconciling us to the orders and appointments of nature. We know enough to be sure that the frame of the world is the effect of infinite wisdom. Every object we see displays in its

structure so much inconceivable skill as is sufficient to demonstrate this. Whatever difficulties therefore occur to us, in contemplating the order of nature and the plan of God's government, we ought in all reason to lay to the account of our ignorance. It is much less wonderful that we meet with many difficulties in our enquiries, than it would be if we should meet with none. In a scheme contrived by infinite wisdom, there must be a great deal that such beings as we are cannot explain. An infant is not so incapable of judging of the policy of a kingdom, or a human hand of grasping the globe, as creatures of our standing and in our situation are of comprehending the ways of Providence. The very perfection of wisdom and goodness in them cannot but make them appear to us irregular in numberless instances. Did we indeed see the whole plan of nature, or were we acquainted with all the ends, connections, and dependences of the different parts of the Divine providence and government, we might then be able to understand them. But as we see next to nothing of them, it is one of the most intolerable follies to set ourselves up as judges of them, or to take upon us to censure and condemn them.

3dly. As our ignorance thus furnishes with an answer to the objections against Providence, it has further a particular tendency to teach us the calmest acquiescence in the disposals of Providence, and the profoundest subjection to it. We know not how the world ought to be governed. It is enough to know that it is well governed. Let us rest in this,—give up our affairs to the direction of higher wisdom, and refer ourselves entirely to the care of that great and good Being who presides over all events, and whose ways are past finding out. No temper can become us more than this. No temper can be more comfortable to ourselves, or more pleasing to God. A child in a state of ignorance and weakness ought to trust implicitly to the wisdom of his parents, and never to dispute the propriety of any of their dealings. This is what we think a duty to earthly parents; but it is infinitely more our duty to the all-wise Parent and Ruler of the world.

There is an unsearchableness in God's ways, and we ought not to expect to find them always free from darkness. The unsearchableness in them we may be sure is an unsearchableness of rectitude and love. Let us

therefore possess our souls at all times in patience, and welcome whatever comes to us from the counsels of Providence, adoring humbly where we cannot comprehend,—believing firmly where we do not see, and resigning joyfully where we are called upon to undergo any sufferings.

4thly. What I have said of our ignorance, should lead us to be contented with any real evidence which we can get on every subject. It will itself shew wretched ignorance to indulge discontent, because we often find ourselves puzzled, or to expect that all points should be quite clear to us. It is true that we ought to push our enquiries as far as we can, and to endeavour to improve our knowledge to the utmost; but at the same time we should remember our own darkness, and learn not to wonder at any difficulties we meet with in our enquiries; always maintaining modesty, diffidence, and submission to Providence, from a deep sense of the imbecility of our understandings, and the shortness of our views. Happy are those who in this manner improve their ignorance. Certain it is, that we have no right to more light than we have, or are capable of attaining by the

faithful use of our faculties. All the light is granted us that is necessary to enable us to answer the ends of our beings, and more we cannot claim without tacitly asserting that we have a right to be omniscient.

Though we know so little of physical causes, the scheme of the creation, and the counsels of Providence, yet we know enough to direct our practice, and to assure us that it is our duty and wisdom, in all circumstances, and at any expence, to be strictly virtuous. No one can have reason to complain of his wanting light, because there is no one from whom more is expected than is suitable to the light which he enjoys. But Christians above all others would be inexcusable in making such a complaint, because to them God has granted supernatural instruction. They are blessed with the gospel of Jesus Christ, where he that runs may read and understand all that is necessary to his salvation and eternal happiness. Let us, then, instead of murmuring against the Deity for not granting us more knowledge, bless him for what we have, and endeavour to make the most of it. Seeing our darkness is so great, and our faculties so narrow, let us apply our

studies chiefly to such moral and religious topics as lie more level to our capacities, and in which our interest is concerned. He that could discover one new rule for mending the heart, or furnish with one new help towards governing passion and practising virtue, would do mankind greater service than could be done by any discoveries or improvements of any other kind.

Lastly. What has been said of our ignorance, should lead our hopes and wishes to that future world, where full day will break in upon our souls, and the clouds which now cover the dispensations of Providence will vanish; where we shall be always growing in knowledge and bliss, and enjoy better opportunities for observing the ways and works of the Deity, and enriching our minds with heavenly truth and wisdom.

We are now novices and infants. When we have passed this imperfect state, and got out of the night of this world; when we have had longer experience, and seen the progress of the Divine dispensation, we shall know more than we now do, and be better able to discern the perfect order and beauty

of nature. To continue always here would be to continue always in darkness and ignorance. *We now know in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. We now think and speak and understand as children; but we shall soon become men, and put away childish things. We now see through a glass darkly, but we shall soon see face to face, and know even as we are known.* Oh glorious time, when our faculties shall improve and ripen. When all our present mistakes shall be rectified, and all our doubts resolved! When Christ and angels shall assist our enquiries, and the eternal fountain of truth be laid open to our view! Would you, brethren, be thus happy? Would you some time or other exchange darkness for light, and error for knowledge? Then apply your time to the cultivation of your hearts, and the practice of piety. Be virtuous now, and you shall be knowing hereafter. All our present accomplishments of wit and learning will in a little time be extinguished. All our present advances in knowledge will (as I observed at the beginning of this discourse) be soon superseded by higher knowledge. But our improvements in goodness will always remain with us, and

lay the foundation of a felicity that will never come to an end. These considerations should lead us to mind nothing in comparison with saving our souls, and preparing them for the inheritance of the saints in light.

SERMON X.

ON HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS.

HEB. xi. 16.

But now they desire a better, that is an heavenly country.

THESE words are introduced by the author of this epistle, after an account which he has given of Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, who, after a course of virtue and piety, had died in faith, not having received the promises; but being persuaded of them, and trusting in them, had shewn that they considered themselves as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and looked for a happier and better, that is a heavenly country. The characters here given of these good men should be applicable to us all, and my present design

is to take occasion from it to deliver an exhortation to you on the subject of heavenly-mindedness or (as it is expressed in my text) the duty of directing our desires and views to a better, that is, an heavenly country; or (as St. Paul expresses it in Col. iii. 1st and 2d, Cor. iv. 18.) the duty of "setting our affections on things above rather than on things on the earth, and looking not at those things which are seen, but at those which are not seen, the things which are seen being temporal, but the things which are not seen being eternal."

In doing this, I shall first desire you to consider the nature and the magnitude of that bliss which is reserved for good men in that better country towards which they are tending. Some notion of it we may derive from considering the following particulars concerning it. It is to consist in seeing and knowing God, in being made better acquainted with his ways and works and the wonders of the creation, — in the highest intellectual and moral improvements, — in better opportunities of being extensively useful, — in a fellowship with the spirits of just men made perfect, and an innumerable company of angels, — in living and

reigning with Christ, and sharing in that glory to which he is raised as our Redeemer. But what most deserves our attention with respect to this happiness is, that it will be eternal in its duration. This makes the value of it properly infinite. St. Paul refers to this when, in the passage I have just quoted, he gives as the reason of our obligation to look at the things which are unseen, that they are eternal. The righteous (our Lord has told us) are to go into life eternal. "We are begotten again by the resurrection of Christ from the dead to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us." We are to outlive the sun and moon and stars. Through boundless ages we are to be improving and rising under the eye and care of the Almighty. I must add that we have reason to depend on this happiness as certain to be enjoyed. God, who cannot lie, has promised it to us, and his Son came into the world to acquire the power of recovering us from death and of introducing us to it. "This is the promise (St. John says) that He has promised even eternal life, and that life is in His Son." John v. 11. The faculties and powers of our immortal souls are such as make us capable of it, and there

are many arguments from reason that lead us to the expectation of it. But the Christian revelation has put it out of doubt. For there we are assured that "when our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." This happiness is further a happiness that is very near us. A few more steps in our journey through this world will bring us to it. "For what is our life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away." Our days fly. Life wastes, and as soon as it is over the virtuous will enter upon a new and endless life. Think now what a happiness this is. Need I ask you whether it does not invite or demand your warmest ambition and wishes? In order to render ourselves more sensible of this, let us compare with it the happiness we enjoy in this world, and the circumstances of imperfection that attend the present state. It is an infant and probationary state. We are only beginning to exist. It is the dawning of day or a feeble childhood which introduces us into the vast creation, and the design of which is to prepare us, by proper exercises and instruction, for future dignity. It follows from hence that it is a state of ig-

norance. We can see little in it of God, or truth, or nature, or providence. The light of reason being but just kindled in us, clouds and darkness surround us, and almost every object is a mystery to us. Our faculties being not yet fully opened, and our situation not admitting of our looking far into the creation, we understand nothing fully. Difficulties obstruct us in our enquiries, and distressing doubts often perplex us.

The present state is also a state in which we are subject to much trouble; and dangers surround us in it, against which we are obliged to be perpetually on our guard. There is little in it that is perfectly sound or pure. Calamity in numberless shapes is continually threatening us, and sometimes it breaks upon us and involves us in misery and wretchedness. Our warmest hopes are frequently disappointed. Sorrow meets us where we expected nothing but pleasure, and our dearest enjoyments and comforts are mingled with pain and anxiety. Could we heap upon ourselves all that we can wish for of the pomps and honours of this life, we should still find ourselves dissatisfied. Our souls would starve in the midst of this kind of plenty. Many

evils would still press upon us, and we might be forced to exclaim with Solomon "that all was vanity and vexation of spirit."

But what is worst of all is, that the present world is a wicked world. It exhibits to us a sad scene of guilt and degeneracy. Crimes of the most detestable kind are continually practised in it. Some we see stupefied by voluptuousness, some stained with blood, and some glorying in treasures obtained by fraud and plunder. And even those virtuous men who deplore the wickedness of the world, and are rising out of its degeneracy to a better state, how do they groan under the remains of sin in themselves? What a strict and constant discipline are they obliged to exercise over their minds, in order to preserve them in tolerable order and peace? How do eager passions often mislead them, and vanquished enemies renew their attacks? How apt are reason and conscience to remit their vigilance? To what stumbles are they liable in the steep ascent of virtue? What fickleness in their resolutions and coldness in the best duties do they complain of, and how hard do they find it to maintain an uniform and consistent course of goodness? I will add here, that

this life is of short duration. Were our happiness in it ever so great, the time for enjoying it is short. The stroke of death will soon make an end of it. All our honours will perish, and the clods of the valley will cover us. "The fashion of this world passeth away, and every thing in it is fleeting and transitory." Such is the present state. What then is it, when viewed in competition with that which I have before described? Let us dwell a little longer here, and go over again some of the particulars that form the contrast that here presents itself to us. We are in this world ignorant. In that world we shall know as we are known. The secrets of nature, and the councils of eternal wisdom will be laid more open to our examination, and the darkness in which we are now involved will be dissipated. In this world we are often mournful and miserable. In that world all tears will be wiped away from our eyes. Rest will succeed labour. Security will succeed danger, and joy take place of sighing and tears. In this world our brightest hopes are damped by fears of disappointment, our pleasures mingled with many pains, our enjoyments precarious, and the tyrant death is continually holding his dart over us, and

threatening to tear from us our sweetest comforts. But in that world there will be no more death. Our pleasures will be solid and eternal. Our hopes will be crowned with possession, and our enjoyments adequate to our improved powers and faculties. Here vanity (according to the decision of the wise man) is written upon every thing, and pride, and discord, and lawless power are continually spreading desolation around us. But into that state malevolence, and vice, and tyranny shall find no admission. Nothing that defileth shall enter, and all will be purity, and peace, and righteousness, and love. Here our virtue is very imperfect, but there all the causes that obstruct our progress in it will cease to operate. Passion will not rise in rebellion against reason. Foolish prejudices will no more deceive us. That mortality which now weighs down our aspiring minds will be swallowed up of life, and better opportunities will be given us of improvement. In short, we are here children under discipline, there we shall become men, and put away childish things. Our present faculties will gain fuller scope for exertion, and probably senses now latent will unfold themselves. Our state of probation will be over.

Our sphere of action will be enlarged. The prisons of clay that now confine our views will be exchanged for mansions of honour, and unclouded endless day open upon us. Is it, fellow-christians, possible for us to hesitate in determining to which of these states we shall principally look? Does not a child naturally look to manhood, and should it not be his chief study to prepare for it? Can we prefer darkness to light, tumult to quietness, and slavery to liberty? Can we avoid considering this world to be nothing, and the next to be all that deserves our anxiety?

I am led from hence to observe to you, 3dly, That an earthly-minded temper is low and sordid, but that the contrary temper confers the highest dignity and honor. Not to aim at the perfection we are made for,— to suffer ourselves to creep on the earth, though capable of aspiring to heaven,— what can be more base? How unworthy is it of beings intended to be happy in the Deity to forget the end of their creation, and with the boundless ages of eternity before them, to chuse to contract their wishes to a moment! Oh, Christians, let us elevate our minds

above this world, and not think of any thing so ignominious as satisfying them with temporal good! Heaven is your home, there let your affections be. Heaven is your country, there let your desires tend. Be not so cruel to yourselves as to suffer any temptation to turn off your attention from your best and highest good. Be not so ungrateful to God, as, notwithstanding his goodness in designing you for a glorious immortality, to declare by your actions that you care not for it.

But in proportion as worldly-mindedness shews ingratitude and meanness, heavenly-mindedness is excellent and noble. Great is the dignity which such a temper bestows on a character, and truly excellent is the person who always lives as one conscious that he has citizenship above, who is ever becoming more free from the defilements of sin and the imperfections of this mortal state. Rising from the vanity of time to the riches of eternity, and thus shewing in himself a noble ardor to grow more like to God and more naturalized to heaven.

4thly, I would point out to you the advantages, with respect to our present interest,

which will attend such a temper as I am recommending. The seducements of the world will have no effect on one who (like St. Paul) is crucified to the world, and whose mind is intent on infinitely nobler enjoyments than any it can offer. The worst that can happen to us here, will appear trifling to one who considers with a lively faith that our present afflictions, which are for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Heavenly-mindedness, therefore, will give the best support under afflictions. It will administer the best consolation in a time of grief and distress. It will mitigate adversity, and render prosperity more joyous, by disposing our minds to complacency and forbearance; and thus increasing the relish for every enjoyment, and laying us more open to all agreeable sensations. Hope is in general a most enlivening principle, and the hope of a better country beyond the grave, where we shall find that all ends well under the divine government, is the most enlivening and animating principle that can possess the human breast. Amidst the commotions and storms of this world, it places us in the situation of a person elevated to the upper regions of the air, who there sees the clouds spread at his

feet, and hears the thunder roar below him. There are certainly none who enjoy this life more than those who look to another life. The reason why Christians are commonly so languid and comfortless as they are, is this worldly-mindedness. Did they carry their views more to their own dignity as immortal beings, they would be more joyful and happy. Temptation would be disarmed. Their virtues would shine with a brighter lustre. They would be more stimulated to noble exertion, and be more ready to devote themselves to the service of their fellow-creatures, and to make a sacrifice of all their worldly interest in the cause of truth and virtue.

In the next place, it should be considered that heavenly-mindedness will be one of the best proofs of our fitness for heaven, and title to it. If you would know where your treasure is, you must enquire where your hearts are; for (as our Saviour has told us) "where your treasure is, there will your hearts be." One of the main points in which the difference between good and bad men consists, is the different degree of their regard to this world and another. Good men are properly called the children of light, because they love light

and look to the future world of light. Bad men, on the contrary, are called the children of the world, because they rest in the world as their only portion. If you are immersed in the cares of this life, and habitually inattentive to what lies beyond it, you belong to this last class of men; and if you profess religion, it must be more the shadow than the substance; it must be a religion consisting in outward forms and ritual services, and not that reasonable service which it ought to be; for what makes it so, is its being a means to an end; and its end is to improve us in virtue, and to form us to a meetness for glory that is to be its reward.

Lastly, let me set before you the particular obligations we are under, as Christ's disciples, to cultivate heavenly-mindedness. The design of the gospel is to draw off our affections from things sensible and temporal. It teaches us that we are strangers and pilgrims, and therefore commands us to abstain from fleshly lusts. Its language is, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.—If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.—Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to ever-*

lasting life. — *Lay not up for yourselves treasures where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust do corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through and steal.* — *If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.* — *Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.*" Such are the exhortations of the New Testament.

We call ourselves Christ's disciples. Let us act as such, by directing our views to him as the author and finisher of our faith, and fixing our hearts where he is; knowing that our life is hid with him in God, and that when he shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory. He has by his resurrection from death and ascension to heaven shewn to our senses the path of life, and begotten us again to a lively hope of an inheritance undefiled and which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us. How shameful will it be for us, if, after such discoveries and after such aids, we continue wedded to this world, and stake ourselves down to low and ignoble objects! He calls us out of this world. Let us

attend to his call, that we may enjoy that peace which the world cannot give. He mentions it as the character of his disciples, "that they are not of the world." Let us prove by our example the truth of this declaration. There is nothing that can make us think more highly of the Christian religion, than that elevation or sublimity of spirit which it is fitted to give. Its heavenly tendency proclaims its heavenly extraction, and we dishonor it miserably when we confine our views to temporal objects. It was excusable in heathens to do this, for they did not know of that grace which St. Paul tells us "was given to mankind in Christ's gospel before the world began; but which was not manifested till the appearing of our Saviour Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light." 2 Tim. i. 10. But even in this respect, some of them have excelled many Christians. There were among them sages who, from a conviction of the immortality of the soul, discovered a superiority to low-minded cares and bodily pleasures, and taught the necessity of living in simplicity and purity, in order to get to the end of life upright and pure, and fit for some better state.

It has been objected to the duty I am recommending, that it has a tendency to depreciate virtue by making it selfish and mercenary. But this objection deserves little notice. A prudent regard to our own interest is a duty; and a regard in our actions to our final interest is one of the most important duties; and the more our actions are governed by it, the more worthy we shall be. It should be considered particularly on this subject, that the future reward of virtue is to be virtue,—the highest degree of moral and intellectual improvement, and a nearer resemblance to the Deity. It is absurd to call any conduct derived from the expectation of such a reward mercenary. The gospel represents heaven to us as a state wherein dwells righteousness, and into which nothing that defileth, or that loveth or maketh a lie, can enter. Vicious men can have no relish for such a state; and as far as any man is influenced by the hope of it, he is influenced by a virtuous motive. In a word, since in all cases a reasonable pursuit of our own happiness is commendable, it must be evident that the pursuit of such happiness as Christianity promises in another life, must be also commendable; and that in truth, so far from de-

preciating virtue, it implies virtue, and must improve and exalt it. But to come to a conclusion. Let me once more urge you to this duty. How happy should we reckon ourselves that God will soon unbind our souls, and deliver us into the glorious order of his children. How should we rejoice that these garments of flesh are to be put off, and that we are not always to dwell in the midst of darkness, folly, and sin! Remember, that it is the relation of this life to another that renders it most valuable; and in this view of it, (that is, when considered as a seed-time for a future harvest,) it is indeed infinitely valuable; and the right state of mind with respect to it is, (while we are thankful to God for it even as a present gift,) yet to value it principally as a preparatory gift, and therefore to be willing to quit it whenever called upon, — to judge of all that happens to us in it by its influence on, or fitness for the life beyond it, and to chuse that alone as our first good and best portion. How honourable and amiable would such a temper make us! But how unhappy is the man who, by devoting his life to low pursuits and criminal pleasures, leaves himself nothing to expect beyond it, but either the punishment of vice, or the loss

of his existence, — the loss of those thoughts that wander through eternity, — to perish, swallowed up, and lost in the womb of uncreated night. Shocking prospect indeed! — May heaven defend us against it, and lead us to true wisdom and virtue, that we may go from hence endowed with that righteousness of character which is the necessary qualification for bliss hereafter; and in the mean time partake of that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and of that joy and exultation which cannot but possess the hearts of those who believe themselves on the borders of a happy eternity; and see the period approaching when they shall be absent from the body, and present with the Lord, — when they shall take leave of sin and sorrow, — have all their doubts resolved, — all their pains removed, — and all their reasonable wishes gratified. What a scene of tumult and delusion is this world! What a weariness is it, to see so many about us hunting shadows as realities, — mistaking nonsense for sacred truth; some weeping over dead relatives, and others over living ones; some hugging empty fame as a solid good, and others filthy lucre; some wallowing in voluptuousness; some, after climbing to power

by intrigue, tumbling down again to disgrace. Here a despot making war on liberty,—there a band of patriots resisting him, and perhaps crushed in the contest. Is it visionary to expect a better world? Has the present state no reference to any thing beyond it? Are we all consigned to oblivion and destruction at death? Are we then to sink never again to rise? This is what some tell us. Such infidelity is the greatest misfortune; and those who make a boast of it, and labour to make converts to it, deserve our scorn as men who are traitors to our species, and enemies to our best hopes and comforts. Leaving these men to think as meanly as they please of themselves, and as beings of a day, to eat and drink, and creep and grovel; let us, remembering our high destination, labour to be stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in every good work, forasmuch as we know that our labour cannot be in vain. Believing that we are immortal beings, let us bestow such a constant attention on the improvement of our characters, as that (should we be at any time asked "what are you living for") we may be able to answer that "we are living for eternity,"—that "we are preparing for a participation in the joys

of angels, and qualifying ourselves, by acting the part of good citizens in this world, for enjoying posts of honour and dignity under a future perfect government in the heavens.

May God quicken us in this glorious work. May he aid us in our endeavours to get this perishing world under our feet. May he give us the treasure of a mind easy within itself, and ripe for immortality, and we need not care what else we may want. The men of this world are scrambling for places, honours, and titles. Let us behold them with pity, and raise our views and wishes to a place hereafter, in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON XI.

ON SPIRITUAL OR INWARD LIBERTY.

2 PETER, ii. 19.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

IN the chapter from which these words are taken, the apostle Peter warns the Christians to whom this epistle was written, against a set of men who then did great mischief in the Christian church. In the account he gives of them, they are represented as false teachers and apostates, who occasioned dangerous factions, and by reason of whom the way of truth was evil spoken of. "They walked," he says, "after the flesh, in lust and

uncleanness; had eyes full of adultery, beguiled unstable souls, denied the Lord that bought them, made merchandize through covetousness of those that followed them; and under a pretence of zeal for liberty, despised government, and spoke evil of dignities."

In the words of my text he observes, that the promises they made to their followers of liberty, were inconsistent and delusive; because they themselves were slaves, — slaves of the worst kind, slaves of vice and corruption; and to prove his assertion, that the vicious are slaves, he adds the general observation, that *by whatever a man is overcome, by that he is enslaved;* "while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants (or as the original word for servants might have been translated) they themselves are the slaves of corruption; for of whatever a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."

My text therefore plainly implies, that vicious men are slaves; that it is an absurdity in them to pretend to be advocates for liberty; and that consequently the practice of

virtue is necessary to give men true liberty. The wicked men that St. Peter had in view opposed the restraints of law and authority, — they vilified civil governors, — renounced the obligations of righteousness, and practised the worst impurities and immoralities; and by doing this, they boasted that they stood up for liberty; not considering their own slavery, and not distinguishing between licentiousness and liberty. There have been in all ages many persons of this stamp. We may find them now in this kingdom. There are among ourselves many who appear as champions for liberty, and are continually haranguing in its favour; but who at the same time seem to be totally ignorant of the true nature of liberty. They are loose in their characters, and have not principle enough to make them decent in their vices. They follow their lusts and passions. They deny themselves no unlawful pleasures, and seem never to have attended to this important truth, "that the virtuous man is the free man, and that he only can possess a just and consistent zeal for freedom;" in short (to repeat the words of my text) *they promise us liberty while they themselves are the slaves of sin; for of whatever a man is overcome, by that he is enslaved,*

whether it be by a tyrant in the state, or by a criminal passion in the character. Being, therefore, slaves, voluntary and wicked slaves, they cannot be enemies to slavery.

You must be sensible, that these observations imply, that there is a moral slavery which ought to be the principal object of our detestation, and consequently a moral liberty which ought to be the principal object of our attachment. My present business will be to explain this, and to shew its importance and excellence.

In order rightly to understand it, you must consider what that is which is most properly a *man's self*. The slightest reflection will shew you, that it is, without doubt, not his passions, but his reason or his judgment, prescribing what is right, and prohibiting what is wrong. The conscience of a man is the man; the reflecting principle is our supreme principle. It is what gives our distinction as intelligent creatures; and whenever we act contrary to it, we violate our natures, and are at variance with ourselves. They are biasses or determinations given us by the author of our beings which we might have wanted, and

which are intended to be subordinate to reason. Now liberty being an exemption from all such force as takes away from us the capacity of acting as we think best, it is plain that whenever any passion becomes predominant within us, or causes us to contradict our sentiments of rectitude, we lose our liberty, and fall into a state of slavery. When any one of our instinctive desires assumes the direction of our conduct in opposition to our reason, then reason is overpowered and enslaved, and when *reason* is overpowered and enslaved, *we* are overpowered and enslaved. On the other hand, when our reason maintains its rights, and possesses its proper seat of sovereignty within us; when it controls our desires and directs our actions so as never to yield to the force of passion, then are we masters of ourselves, and free in the truest possible sense. A person governed by his appetites is most properly a slave. *To will* (as St. Paul speaks) *is present with him, but how to perform that which is good he knows not. What he would, that he does not. But what he hates, that he does. He delights in the law of God after the inward man; but he has another law in his members warring against the law of*

his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. Rom. vii. 22 and 23.

There is but one just authority in the mind, and that is the authority of conscience. Whatever conquers this, puts us into a state of oppression. Every principle, except reason, that can get an ascendancy within us is an usurper, and all submission to it is a base submission to an usurpation. What I am now saying, shews us how wrong wicked men are in some of the notions they are disposed to entertain. They are apt to think themselves the only persons who possess liberty, and to consider the virtuous as the only persons who are obliged to submit to confinement and self-denial. But it plainly appears that they are totally and essentially mistaken. It is no more true liberty to follow every vagrant inclination that happens to prevail within us, than it would be true liberty to make ourselves the dupes of every ignorant and insolent creature, who in our civil affairs would claim a power to direct us. To be carried away blindly by any thing contrary to our own approbation, is to be reduced to captivity and servitude. Every man is a law to himself. As far as he has the ability of com-

plying with this law; he has self-dominion and is free. But as far as there are any internal principles which overpower its influence, so far he is in a violent and unnatural condition. He reproaches and condemns himself, and is conscious of giving up his dignity and honour. I am sensible that doing whatever our passions incline us to do, without regarding reason, has the appearance of being the same with never denying ourselves, and being free from all restraint. So the generality of men often talk and think. But in truth, following passion wherever it carries us, is being under the worst sort of restraint, and practising the worst self-denial. It is the same with being restrained from gratifying our highest powers and doing what we ought to do. A restraint laid upon conscience has certainly much more in it of what should be deemed restraint to a reasonable being, than any restraint laid upon passion. The latter can scarcely with any propriety be deemed restraint at all. It is only the power of following our judgments, and doing what our hearts approve and require. When this power is lost, then and then only are we most truly confined and restrained. The dominion of passion (as far

as it takes place within us) is a kind of brute force unsettling our resolutions, and shackling our wills. It is licentiousness in the mind which produces a like restraint upon liberty and the same kind of evils, with licentiousness in the state.

It has been often observed, that licentiousness in a state is attended with an infringement of liberty, and some of the greatest evils of slavery. In such a state the rights of every member are liable to perpetual invasion. Oppression and violence prevail, and a riotous mob governs instead of a wise and a good legislature. What is similar to this may be said with great propriety of that licentiousness which takes place in the mind when the passions become tumultuous and ungovernable. These observations prove that the idea of confinement or restraint belongs most properly to vice only. Most certainly that is the worst force we can be under, which prevents us from doing what our duty and interest require. The like is true of self-denial. It is not the man who denies his passions in obedience to his judgment who most properly practises self denial, but the man who does the contrary,—the man who

denies his judgment in obedience to his passions. This man denies what alone is truly himself. He denies his reason. He denies his best and highest powers; and subjects himself necessarily to self-reproach and remorse. To deny passion at the call of rectitude is to gratify ourselves in the noblest manner; but to deny conscience at the call of passion, is to wound ourselves fatally.

It may appear to some, that the account now given of moral liberty implies an inconsistency between it and natural liberty; but there cannot be a more wrong apprehension. On the contrary, the former implies the latter, and cannot exist without it; for from this account it follows, that the most perfect moral liberty takes place where there is the strongest attachment to rectitude, and the least capacity of deviating from it; and where therefore there is the least degree of that indifference in which some have said that natural liberty consists.

But this objection is founded on a mistake concerning the true notion of natural liberty. It by no means signifies an indifference of will with respect to the way in which we shall act;

but merely the power of self-determination, and it is alike common to all agents as such, and incapable of any variety of degrees. The greatest certainty of acting in one way in consequence of the influence of motives can never clash with it. If a being is the efficient of his own actions, or begins motion in himself, he is naturally free, whatever may be true of his character and dispositions.

A person in his senses will not wantonly throw himself into a fire and destroy himself. This is absolutely certain; but it would be absurd to suppose that in this instance he has not natural liberty. We should say of a man on the top of a precipice, that he cannot jump down; and we should also say, if he were at the bottom of the precipice, that he cannot leap up. But every one must see that one of these expressions is much more proper than the other, and that the two *cannots* have totally different senses. The one is properly no more than *a will not*, the other is literally a *cannot* on account of the want of power, or a natural incapacity. The one is moral necessity, consistent with complete physical liberty, and the other is a natural necessity which utterly destroys all agency and liberty. But

this is a speculation that may be too abstruse for this discourse, and into which therefore I shall not further enter.

What I mean chiefly to observe is, that a submission to reason is so far from being capable of being considered in any way inconsistent with liberty, that on the contrary it supposes natural liberty; and is the very idea of that moral liberty which is my present subject. The more we are in subjection to reason, the more power we have to do as we like. The dictates of reason are the dictates of our own hearts; and obeying them is following the dictates of our hearts, and therefore the very reverse of any thing that can be deemed force or slavery. The absolute government of reason would be an absolute dominion over our resolutions and actions, and therefore would be absolute and perfect liberty; the absolute government of passion on the other hand would be an absolute incapacity of acting as we approve, and therefore would be an absolute moral impotence, or complete slavery. To be governed by our consciences is to be governed by our own choice. To be governed by passion, is to have a force put upon us in

opposition to our own choice; for whoever does wrong in compliance with passion, is dragged in a manner to what he does. He loaths it at the time he does it. He feels himself not master of his conduct, and groans under a sense of his miserable weakness.

The observations I have now made shew plainly that there is a considerable analogy between civil and moral liberty; and it may not be amiss to proceed to what I further intended in this discourse, to point out this analogy to you.

In a kingdom enjoying civil liberty every member is in possession of his just rights, and keeps his proper place. He judges and acts for himself, without being liable to any disturbances or encroachments from arbitrary power. His person and his property are secure against lawless insult and oppression. He submits to no impositions or burthens but such as he lays upon himself. He is subject to no laws but such as he has given his consent to. No rapacity or violence has the power of controling him in his pursuits or of unjustly breaking in upon his acquisitions and enjoyments. Such is a state of civil liberty, and such also exactly is that moral liberty

on which I am discoursing. He who is blest with it, possesses the just rights and privileges of a reasonable creature. Every power within him keeps its proper place, and performs its proper functions without being allowed to assume more than belongs to it, or to encroach on any of his other powers. He judges for himself, and acts agreeably to his judgment, without being subject to the control of any lawless desires. He has no internal tyrants and oppressors which break in upon his quiet, and reduce him into captivity. His soul is guarded against the rude attacks and insolencies of every enemy that would deprive him of his self-government and self-dominion. The law to which he is subject is no other than the law of his own mind—a law to which he gives his willing and hearty consent. He submits to no burthen, but such as he thinks fit to take upon himself. He is governed by the authority of reason, and not by the violence and arbitrariness of passion. Instead of going where humour and inclination direct, and doing as they require, he keeps in the path he approves, and does as his own heart directs, never yielding to any kind of usurpation, or suffering himself to be carried by any thing contrary to the convictions of his conscience. This is the true

and perfect notion of liberty, and such is the liberty which is enjoyed by every virtuous man, and to which we all ought to aspire.

What remains for me to do in this discourse, is to mention a few reasons in order to recommend this liberty to you. The bare description of it is indeed enough to make every one to desire it earnestly. From the account I have given of it, you must see that it is replete with blessings and advantages.

Let me, however, desire you, 1st, To consider particularly what an honour there is in liberty, and what a baseness in sin. That liberty which I have explained implies in it health and order of mind. All the faculties of the man who possesses it are in their right and sound state. The immortal and divine part maintains its just supremacy, and the inferior principles are guided by it. A due balance is established among the affections — every desire moves in its proper place, and all the internal springs of action contribute their proper share towards guarding, preserving, and perfecting the soul. It follows from hence, that to be free in the sense I have explained, is to possess the noblest vigour and

independence of mind. A free soul is firm, active, and intrepid. It is independent of the world, and superior to the assaults of every enemy. It pursues an uniform course of upright conduct, unmoved by pleasure and undaunted by fear. Nothing can turn it aside from its duty: nothing baffle its resolution, or bring it into any kind of bondage: no silly prejudices warp it in the search of truth, nor can any temptations prevent its faithful adherence to truth. It is manifest that there is nothing so great and respectable as such a mind. "He who ruleth his own spirit (as Solomon tells us) is better than he who taketh a city." One passion conquered gives a nobler proof of true magnanimity than could be given by the conquest of the world. To be exempted in our endeavours to find out truth from the influence of authority, education, and interest—to enquire freely and to abide steadily by what we think to be right—to be able to restrain or suspend as we please the operations of our passions, and to prescribe laws and limits to our warmest appetites—to stand firm and erect amidst trials and dangers—and in all circumstances to have our own deliberate judgment our only rule of conduct—this is our best and most honourable

state — this is the highest dignity and perfection to which any being can attain.

But in proportion as this state is glorious and honourable, the contrary state is mean and despicable. To lose inward liberty is to lose all that can procure esteem, and to become poor, abject, and impotent. If we had a proper sense of our distinctions and rights as men, we could never bear to fall into such a state. To be governed by mean prejudices — to be the minion of appetite — to be the sport of a brutal desire — not to be masters of our own purposes, but to behold our most valuable privileges at the will of a passion — this is the worst degradation and infamy into which we can sink. We commonly think with horror and detestation of civil slavery, but this moral slavery is infinitely a more proper object of our horror and detestation. It is the ruin of all that is manly and worthy in the mind.

But 2dly, Let me desire you to consider what advantages and blessings liberty of mind will bring with it. A free mind is no less happy than it is great and honourable; and an enslaved mind is no less wretched than it is

base and abject. The discerning faculties of the person who possesses this liberty must be more clear than that of any other man. There is nothing within him to interrupt the light of truth, or to drown the voice of reason. He hath calm and quiet enjoyment of himself. He is a stranger to the cutting pangs of remorse, and the wild uproar of tumultuous lusts. He is the seat of harmony, peace, and tranquillity. The passions fulfil their proper ends without exceeding their proper limits. They produce pleasure and gratification without unsettling the adjustments of his mind, by becoming untractable and licentious. They aid and quicken him in his pursuits, without precipitating and endangering him. They are like wind and tide, which carry on the vessel of life without driving it on rocks, or causing it to overset and sink. It is not indeed possible to imagine what satisfaction takes place in a mind which has a full dominion over itself, and where the sacred blessing of liberty sheds its influence. There is in such a mind a consciousness of dignity, which is more desirable than any sensual gratification, and which cannot be given by the possession of any worldly honors and titles. There are no such sources of joy and rapture as a command-

ing reason and vanquished passions, and it is here alone that we ought to seek the happiness we universally wish for. But the slave of passion—the man who wants the ability of doing as he approves and serves his lusts, what a miserable drudge is such a man? what inward tortures does he endure?

We are all sensible of the dreadful evils commonly attending civil wars;—but there is no such civil war as there is in the soul of such a man. There is no such scene of riot, disorder, and distress. Think here more particularly of the dreadful remorse which a person of this condition must feel. He is ashamed of the indignity which he puts upon himself, and under a sense of his own thraldom he cannot help hating himself and crying out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this bondage?" We should remember that reason when dethroned will endeavour to regain its authority, and therefore will produce tumults and insurrections. If it is not allowed its just rights, it will avenge itself by rending our souls, and obliging us to turn our own tormentors.

Having thus endeavoured to explain spiri-

tual liberty, and to shew its importance, I must beg leave now to enquire what you will do:—stand up for this liberty? or surrender it to the enemies of your happiness? Is it possible that any of us should chuse to sacrifice this liberty, and with it this honour, credit, and happiness to base and wretched passions? How wonderful is it that there should be any occasion for exhorting men to be free and not slaves, or in other words to be *men* and not *brutes?* We all of us, in this happy country, glory in our privileges as free men. We often hear the highest encomiums on liberty, and it is without doubt impossible to say too much in praise of it.

Without natural liberty the whole creation would be nothing but a system of dead and worthless machinery. Without civil liberty all communities would want order, dignity, and virtue; and without moral liberty all individuals are blind, impotent, and miserable. In every sense of the word, therefore, liberty is one of the first and most essential blessings. We are all in this country justly zealous for civil liberty. Would to God we were all free in the best sense! That civil liberty which we so passionately admire has nothing valuable

in it compared with the liberty which I have been explaining. To this then let us apply our warmest zeal. He who is conscious of wanting this, should be ashamed of pretending any zeal for the other. To have the soul in shackles is infinitely worse than to have the body in shackles. To submit to the despotism of debasing lusts is infinitely more disgraceful than to submit to the despotism of a civil usurper, and he who does the one may without great difficulty be drawn to do the other.

I am exhorting you, fellow-christians, to be free. You may say that you are *Britons*, and therefore in possession of freedom. But the proper reply is that made by our Saviour to the Jews "he that committeth sin is the servant of sin." If in any instance you are subject to your passions you are in slavery; for, as St. Peter says in my text, "*Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.* Resolve then to guard against this slavery. Happy the man who has established his mind in purity, who has raised himself above low prejudices and appetites; and is independent of the world and all its temptations. Such a man is the greatest of mortals. He

is under the protection of the Deity, and the happiness he now enjoys will be continued to him to all eternity.

It would be proper on this subject to give an account of the best means for acquiring and maintaining inward liberty. But I shall only mention the following direction. If you would be free, put yourself under the influence of the Christian religion, and attend to its doctrines. In the truth of the gospel we have the best means of success. Christianity is the perfect law of liberty. It affords the strongest motives to goodness, and those who study it properly, cannot fail of recovering themselves from the bondage of corruption, and attaining to the glorious attributes of the children of God.

SERMON XII.

TRUST IN GOD, THE BEST SUPPORT OF THE RIGHTEOUS UNDER AFFLICTIONS.

ISAIAH, L. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light; let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

VARIOUS are the calamities to which human life is subject, and it is impossible to be better employed than in endeavouring to alleviate them by administering consolation under them. There is no one who has not something or other to disturb his rest, and to try his patience. Many groan under heavy trials and afflictions, and those

who are are now freest from trouble, and most prosperous and happy, know not how soon the scene may change, and sickness, sorrow, and adversity take place of health and mirth and gaiety. Considerations, therefore, which have a tendency to support under trouble, or to prepare us for it, can never be offered unseasonsably. In such circumstances I cannot address myself to you in more proper words than those of the prophet Isaiah, which I have just read to you.

In these words three things offer themselves to our consideration. 1st. the circumstances they describe, *walking in darkness, and seeing no light.* 2dly, the very important truth, that in such circumstances our best relief is *trusting in the name of the Lord, and staying ourselves upon God;* and 3dly, this further truth, that the relief derived from hence can be enjoyed only *by those that fear the Lord.*

Let us first consider the circumstance expressed by the words *walking in darkness, and having no light.* This description is properly applicable only to circumstances of the deepest distress. In our darkest hours there are

generally some rays of light left. If some enjoyments are withdrawn, others remain. If we suffer in one way, we receive pleasure in another. Seldom does it happen that our condition is so deplorable as to be entirely gloomy and wretched. I shall not, therefore, confine this discourse to such a case, but consider the words as a general description of those evils, great and small, which in the present world involve the path of life in darkness, and diminish the happiness allotted to us. It would be vain to attempt to give any particular account of the evils to which human life is subject. *All things*, the wise man tells us, *are full of labour, man cannot utter it.* Numberless are the afflictions in body, mind, or fortune to which we are liable, and under which mankind are continually suffering. While some are complaining of their losses, others are lamenting their successes. While some are mourning over dead relatives, others are mourning over living ones. One was lately happy in a companion and friend, — a wife perhaps, a husband, or a child who was the comfort and delight of his life; but he has been torn from him by the stroke of death. He is left alone to travel the journey of life. He recollects

with anguish the happiness he has lost, and a black veil is spread over all his enjoyments. Another has met with disappointments in his pursuits, or misfortunes in business. He has been crossed in his hopes, and has miscarried in his undertakings. He is sunk under difficulties, and reduced from ease and plenty and affluence to perplexity and poverty. One is languishing under a fatal distemper, — his strength exhausted, and his spirits broken; the capacity of enjoying pleasure gone, the king of terrors threatening him, and the dreary grave opening to receive him. Another is pining away in a deep melancholy, terrified by apprehensions of imaginary evils, a stranger to every cheerful thought, anxious and distressed he knows not why, every object about him thrown into a dismal shade, and his whole soul wrapped up in darkness and horror.

In such circumstances we are necessarily led to look out for comfort. Our condition would be dismal indeed had we nothing to stay our minds upon, or no cheering reflections to make in a time of private or public distress, when perhaps all the help of man is vain. But this is not our case. There is an

anchor of hope on which we may always rely when tossed on the tempestuous sea of this world. There is a fund of consolation to which we may always have recourse amidst the calamities to which we are liable. I mean, *trusting in the name of the Lord, and staying ourselves upon God.* This is the relief to which we are directed by the words of my text. Are then any of us dejected or unhappy? Is our prospect darkened by any cloud, or are we discouraged by the prospect of impending evil? Let us turn our thoughts to the Deity, and reflect on his perfect government. Let us consider that the Lord reigneth, and that his righteous Providence directs all events; and that we cannot suffer except by the will of a wise and faithful Creator. This will throw a bright light into our minds, and give us relief and support in all circumstances.

In order to be more explicit here, I would observe, 1st. that in such circumstances we should consider, that the Deity is always intimately present with us, and sees all that passes in the world. It is his constant influence that preserves the world, and were he to withdraw his hand, or to suspend his energy, all nature

would fall to pieces. He cannot, therefore, be unacquainted with any thing we feel or fear. He is indeed one with our souls; the first mover in every motion, and the animating principle which gives efficacy to all the powers of nature.

2dly. In times of darkness it is proper we should further consider that this Being who is continually present with us, stands in the nearest relation to us. He is our parent, — we are his offspring. He is our maker, — we are his creatures; and it is impossible there should be a nearer relation than that of children to their parent, or of creatures to their Creator. From Him we derive all our faculties, — to Him we owe all we possess; the world is the work of his hands, and through and to Him are all things.

3dly. To these reflections, let us add that this Being, thus present with us, and thus related to us, is almighty, all-wise, and all-benevolent. He is almighty, for it is self-evident that He who made all things must have an absolute command over all things. This is is a sufficient reason for ascribing to Him infinite power; and in the same way we

may be assured that he is all-wise. In the structure of the world, and in the frame of all the meanest objects in it we observe proofs of incomprehensible contrivance and skill; and it follows from hence, with the clearest evidence, that the Maker must be incomprehensibly wise. God is the source of all the order, all the nice adjustments, and all the regular symmetry and beauty in nature; and therefore so perfect and exquisite, that it is impossible to contemplate them without admiring and adoring his wisdom. He is in particular the source of all the knowledge and wisdom which are possessed by the different orders of beings in the universe. To Him all reasonable creatures owe all their ideas, all their sagacity, and skill. What a vast sum of knowledge would all the knowledge scattered through the world make, if collected and united in one Being? The Deity is that one Being. He possesses in himself all their knowledge, and infinitely more; for he is the unoriginated spring of it all.

The cause of all order, the parent of all mind, the giver of all knowledge, cannot be imagined to have exhausted himself by what he has produced. All that we or any of his

creatures can see or conceive of intelligence or wisdom can be no more than a faint shadow of the fullness which dwells in his essence. In short, he that wishes to obtain a lively conviction that there exists in nature an almighty and perfect Reason which pervades and guides all things; let him look over the world,—let him contemplate its beauty and order,—let him reflect on the perfection of workmanship and art displayed in every plant and insect,—let him think of the knowledge which exists in the various orders of beings who compose the system of the universe; and let him at the same time consider that the cause must always be endued with a higher degree of those perfections which exist in the effect. And if, after this, he can want conviction, or remain in the smallest degree incredulous, he must have a mind strangely blind and insensible.

But what is most of all important is, that the Deity is all-benevolent as well as almighty and all-wise. There is, we have seen, a self-existent Power and Intelligence which gave birth to all things. Now benevolence is a part of the idea of Intelligence; for the fitness of the communication of happiness, or

the rectitude of benevolence is one of the first truths, and must therefore be one of the first objects of intelligence. This makes up all that we can wish to be true, and finishes the character of the Deity. He lives as necessarily as he is truth and power. Infinite power implies in it infinite intelligence, and since moral fitnesses are a part of truth, infinite intelligence implies in it perfect moral rectitude, and particularly boundless beneficence. Infinite power, wisdom, and goodness therefore form one idea, and are necessarily united in the first Cause. There is no truth so important as this. It throws a lustre on every object, and is enough to reconcile us to every event. It is confirmed by the voice and testimony of all nature. Wherever we see power displayed, there we see benevolence displayed.

The whole design of that adaptation of means to ends, of that correspondence of objects to one another, and of all that amazing skill and harmony which we see in the constitution of the world, is to provide for and to give subsistence to living beings, who are all the offspring of benevolence. There is not a single instance to be found in which the Author of

nature appears to have intended pain for its own sake. The common and ordinary state of every living creature is a state of health, and of some kind of enjoyment. A state of suffering is always a violent state, or the consequence of throwing nature out of its proper and usual course. Our pains are always either necessary remedies for some disorders, or necessary preservatives from some dangers, or a necessary stimulus to some useful exertion. What wretched creatures should we be, did we not continually receive the admonitions given us by the pains of hunger and thirst, — of fear and anger and shame? The pain of a wound or of a distemper is intended for no other purpose than to engage us to take care of our own preservation. The pain of remorse is intended to deter us from the commission of sin. The pain we receive from the misconduct of relatives, — the troubles of friends, or the calamities of our country, are the necessary effects of those public affections and kind instincts which link us to one another, and without which we should lose all the joys of society.

The like is true in every instance; nor is it possible to make the smallest alteration in the

plan of nature, without either losing some greater good than that which we would secure, or producing some greater evil than that which we would exclude. I know there are men who think themselves wise enough to discover errors in the constitution of nature, and to be able to show how it might have been contrived in a better manner. I wonder at the folly and presumption of these men. It would be strange indeed if they (poor reptiles of the dust) could see further than the Being that made them; or were wiser than that Nature to which they owe all their wisdom. But all their objections have hitherto proved no more than their ignorance. The more the works of God have been enquired into, the more their perfect order has been seen, and the more reasonable it has appeared to ascribe all that puzzles us in them to the narrowness of our views, and the imperfection of our faculties.

How ridiculously arrogant does that king appear to us (now that the true order of the solar system has been discovered) who said, that "if the Creator had consulted him, he could have directed to a better disposition of the heavenly bodies." I have no doubt, if

we had just views of Nature and Providence, but that we should see all the faults that atheistical men have found with them to be equal proofs of presumption and arrogance.

Nothing can afford such a ground for consolation in seasons of darkness, as the reflection on which I am now insisting; on this joyful and glorious truth, that there exists in nature a self-existent and perfect Reason, which gave being to all things, — which pervades, governs, and conducts all things to the best ends. We cannot with proper attention contemplate nature without perceiving this, and it gives a stay for our minds which can never fail or disappoint us. The immediate and necessary inference from it is, that we cannot possibly fall into any distress, or suffer any evil which it is unfit we should suffer. This is just as certain as that there is a Deity who is present with us, and knows what we suffer; that he is our Maker, and cannot see what we suffer with indifference; that he is omnipotent, and able to remove it — infinitely good, and inclined to remove it. Remember this, whenever any afflictions threaten you. Look up then to the first Cause, and consider that his goodness cannot but chase

out of nature every calamity as soon as it becomes needless or improper.

My feelings have been sometimes so shocked when I have seen a fellow-creature groaning under distress, that I have been ready to cry out in my haste, "how is it possible that such sufferings should be consistent with the goodness of the Deity?" But I have soon corrected myself by considering, whence did I receive these feelings? Can I be more compassionate than the Being who gave me my compassion? Were he malevolent, would he have made me to detest malevolence? Is it credible that he should have planted within me principles which render his own character shocking to me? Let us then in every season of private trouble, or public calamity, *trust in the name of the Lord, and stay ourselves upon God.* We exist not in a forlorn or fatherless world. We are the care and charge of infinite wisdom. All is well in nature, and every event subject to the best superintendency. We can wish for nothing beyond this. In such circumstances, to repine and mourn would be folly intolerable. It would be to repine and mourn because the world is not governed according to our nar-

row views; that is, because it is not governed wrong. Could we work into our hearts these convictions, or bring ourselves properly under their power, we should receive every affliction as a blessing; and in the midst of a storm or convulsion that may overturn a kingdom, we should hear a voice whispering peace to us, and assuring us of a favourable and happy issue. In short, knowing that every circumstance in the constitution of the world, and the administration of events is right beyond a possibility of correction, and good beyond a possibility of improvement, we should at all times take up the words of the prophet Habbakuk, *although the fig-tree should not blossom, or fruit be in the vine, though the labour of the olives should fail, and the fields yield no meat, and the flock be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stall; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the God of my salvation.*

I cannot help observing here particularly, that our confidence in the Deity ought to be implicit; and that no appearances of irregularity in the dispensations of his providence ought to have any tendency to destroy it. Such appearances are unavoidable to creatures

who see but a part of the plan, of Providence, and who are such incompetent judges of it as we are. There could not indeed be a stronger objection to it than our finding it so level to our capacities, that nothing in it appeared to us irregular or mysterious. This would be a greater difficulty than any that now occurs to us, in contemplating God's government. It would imply, that the world was established, and that the course of events is directed by a wisdom no higher than our own.

In examining the works of a complete artist, do you ever expect to understand the propriety and beauty of every part of it? In order to this, ought you not yourself to be a complete artist? In reading a learned book, do you not always reckon the obscurer parts to be of a piece with the other parts — and not conclude them to be nonsense, because you do not understand them? In considering also the measures of any human government, do we not always reckon the same kind of allowance for our own ignorance to be reasonable? In the present instance there is infinitely more reason for making such an allowance; for we are infinitely less qualified to judge of the works of God and the scheme

of Providence, than the lowest of us are to judge of the measures of the best-conducted government.

It is necessary I should add, that all the encouragements on which I have now insisted are confirmed and encreased by the Christian revelation. The arguments I have offered prove that we may assuredly expect an exemption from every evil that it is improper we should suffer, and the possession of every good that it is proper we should enjoy. The voice of Revelation concurs with reason in giving us this expectation. Christianity teaches us, that "not a sparrow falls to the ground without our heavenly Father, — that the hairs of our head are all numbered by him, — that His tender mercies are over all His works, — that He never willingly grieveth any of us, — that afflictions are sent by Him for our correction and improvement, — that He only is wise and righteous, and at the same time in such a degree that it may be justly said that there is none besides good, — and that, in particular, He has displayed his goodness to us in sending Christ, the great Messiah, into the world to reveal His will to us, to deliver us from death, and to bring us to a blessed and

glorious immortality." This is an information which raises our hopes to infinity; and under the influence of this hope we are exhorted to rejoice evermore, in every thing to give thanks, and to welcome tribulation as working for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The language which the Scriptures direct us to adopt in times of darkness is such language as the following: "When my soul fainteth I will remember the Lord, He is my light and my refuge, therefore will I not fear, though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. O Lord of hosts blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee; he shall not be afraid of the terror by night, or the arrow that flieth by day; no evil shall befal him, neither shall any plague come nigh his dwelling."

3dly. It should be observed that the exhortation in my text is addressed only to the pious and obedient, and it intimates to us plainly, that the trust in God, which gives support in affliction, can be exercised only by them. It is in *well-doing* that we are commanded to commit our souls to God. If we

practise iniquity we have nothing to look for but his displeasure. The restraint of wickedness is one necessary instance of the perfect righteousness of his administration. Exact order takes place in the constitution of nature and the dispensations of providence, and this order will appear in the treatment we shall receive. But then, it will appear only in the happiness that will be doomed us, or the suffering that will be inflicted upon us. God's government proceeds by judgments as well as by blessings, by punishments as well as by rewards; and this is absolutely necessary to the production of the greatest good.

In forming our expectations therefore from the universal Parent, we must examine our characters, remembering always this fundamental truth, that *to every one shall be given according to his works.* If our trust is not regulated by a regard to this truth, it will be nothing but a dangerous delusion. We may be assured *that whatever is, is right;* but at the same time we should consider, that in the case of vicious beings that *right* consists in making them examples of the pernicious consequences of vice. The order of the world, and the very benevolence of the Deity re-

quire this. How deplorable is such a condition? In the midst of the harmony of nature, to have no reason for joy. To possess principles and habits which are obstacles to the Divine munificence, and to lose all share in that boundless profusion of blessings, which are distributed through the creation—to be in a state which forces us to reflect with terror on that government of the Deity which is the spring and the security of all happiness, and to make goodness itself our enemy and avenger? What can be so horrible or shocking!

But to come to a conclusion, we are, fellow-christians, fallen into dark times; but we should not suffer ourselves to despond. That person has no reason to be afraid of evil tidings whose heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. Should private or public adversity come, we may be assured that all will be made to end well, and to issue in the advancement of truth and righteousness.

Under this apprehension, let us look up with confidence to the Supreme Disposer of all events, believing the doctrine on which I have been insisting, "that infinite wisdom

and goodness govern the world—that every thing takes place in nature which the most benevolent heart can justly desire, and that a good man has nothing to do but to leave events to God, and to wait quietly for his salvation."

Let others dance the round of pleasure—Let others fly for relief to the dissipations so prevalent among us—But let us follow the advice in my text—*Let us trust in the name of the Lord, and stay ourselves upon God.* This, I have shewn you, is the best relief in a state of suffering, and the only ground of peace, and hope, and joy in all circumstances.

SERMON XIII.

ON THE NATURE OF TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATTHEW XXV. 46.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

THESE few words express the most interesting and awful truths that can possibly enter into the mind of man. They were uttered by that person whom we all believe to be the Son of God and our future judge. They inform us what the future lot is to be of the whole human race. Some of them are to go into everlasting punishment, and the rest into life eternal. By everlasting punishment here is plainly meant the same that is elsewhere called everlasting destruction and the second death, or the same with what our

Lord means, when in other places he speaks of "burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire," and "throwing the tares into a furnace of fire, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth." It would be extremely absurd to understand such phrases in a sense strictly literal. They can mean no more than a miserable extermination, like that of chaff or tares when thrown into an inextinguishable fire which consumes them. On the contrary, by everlasting life in my text is plainly meant *preservation*, in opposition to *extermination*,— an everlasting existence in opposition to everlasting destruction, — a blessed immortality in opposition to a second death. These different ends, our Lord tells us, are to await men according to their different conduct and characters; that is, the wicked part of mankind, the *goats* whom he represents in the preceding verses as rejected by him, as turned to his left hand and ordered into that fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. These are to be sent into everlasting punishment, but the righteous, the *sheep* whom he represents as placed on his right hand, and as preserved and favoured — these are to go into life eternal; they are to go into life, not into death, like the workers of

iniquity; into life eternal, a state of happiness where they shall exist and improve for ever under the eye and care of the Almighty.

It is of unspeakable importance to us to possess clear ideas of the two opposite characters here referred to, or of the principles and qualifications which will constitute us in our Saviour's sense those goats who are to be rejected, or sheep who are to be preserved, and made happy for ever. Into these two classes, or in other words into the righteous and wicked, our Lord divides all mankind; and my business will be to endeavour to assist you in forming just ideas of this grand division, by shewing you what that is, which will constitute us truly righteous, and the want of which will prove that we ought to be classed among the workers of iniquity. I am sensible that this is a subject of a truly delicate nature, and nothing could have led me to the selection I have now made of it, but a conviction of its particular importance. If too loose an account is given of the essence of a virtuous character, negligence and licentiousness will be encouraged, and many perhaps confirmed in mistakes concerning themselves which will prove pernicious to them. On the

contrary, if too strict an account is given, the endeavours of men to acquire virtue may be discouraged, and those who are in reality possessed of it may be led to an unreasonable despondence and scrupulosity. I think that I shall avoid both these extremes by insisting on the four following particulars, as necessary to entitle us to the denomination and character of righteous men. 1st. The establishment within us of good principles, and acting from them. 2dly. The superior efficacy of such principles within us to the efficacy of all other principles. 3dly. The manifestation of their superiority by avoiding all habitual guilt and practising all known duties: and 4thly, a constant endeavour to grow better.

1st. The establishment of good principles within us, and acting from them. The principles of action within us are various; and some of them may produce a conduct outwardly good, when at the same time there may be no true goodness in the character. Of this kind are the fear of the disgrace attending a vicious conduct, the love of peace, and the desire of private emolument. As far as these or any such principles actuate us, so

far we cannot be deemed virtuous. The proper motives of virtue are the love of truth and right, and a regard to God's will and authority; and it is only as far as we are influenced by these motives that we are virtuous. The proper end of a moral agent as such, is virtue; and nothing can be virtue but what proceeds from a love to it for its own sake, and on its own account; nor can any thing be properly religion as distinguished from virtue, but what is done from a regard to the Deity, and in obedience to his will and authority.

2dly. The efficacy of these principles within us must be superior to the efficacy of any other principles. In other words, they must not only exist within us and influence our conduct, but they must be predominant. It is evident that they may possess our hearts, but not in a due degree. It is in truth impossible that any one should be quite destitute of them. Though not predominant, they will remain, and if they do not govern they will torment. It is proper to observe here that the human frame is a composition of various passions and affections answering different purposes, and standing in different

relations to one another, but all under the government of reason or of conscience. This is the proper natural state of man, and true goodness is nothing but the preservation of it, by maintaining conscience and the Deity in the throne of our minds, and keeping all the passions and affections in subjection to them. Wickedness, on the contrary, is the violation and loss of this sound and healthy state by the tyranny of the passions, and the disobedience of our lower powers to the authority of reason. This will shew us that whenever any one of our passions gets the ascendancy over us, and in any instance produces a habit of conduct, we lose true goodness, — the order of the soul is broken, God and conscience are no longer possessed of the supreme controuling power within us, and therefore our characters become properly vicious. Would we then obtain a just knowledge of ourselves, we must compare our regard to the obligations of truth and righteousness with our regard to other objects, — the influence of reason with the force of passion. We must enquire whether there is any one of our lower powers which conquers and enslaves our higher powers. We must place our love of God, our concern

about our eternal interest, and zeal for what is holy and worthy in one scale,—and our love of the world, our concern about our temporal interest and regard for fame and profit and pleasure in the other scale, and find which preponderates. If we find that we are less attached to our temporal than our spiritual interest,—that we prefer the favour of God and the joys of virtue to every thing that can come in competition with them,—that we are ready to renounce all honour and pleasure rather than give up our integrity, and that all our affections are in a state of subordination to that faculty which God has made to be our ruling faculty: If, I say, we find this to be true of ourselves, then is our moral state good, our characters virtuous, and our acceptance certain. Nor is it possible for any considerate person to imagine that less than this can be sufficient to constitute a righteous character. Can he be a good man who loves the world more than his Maker? who prefers his money or his credit to his piety? who minds temporal more than eternal things,—or who has any one object of pursuit which engages him more than the pursuit of virtue, or any one propensity that is stronger than his conscience? It is indeed upon this point that

all turns in the present question. And till the moral part gets the victory over the animal part of our nature; or in other words, till the man within us can controul the brute, and the principles of piety and virtue obtain some degree of real supremacy, we must continue among the votaries of vice, and in a state of guilt and danger.

It is to be feared that some deceive themselves by concluding too hastily from the operation of good principles within them, that they are virtuous, without enquiring into the degree of efficacy which these principles possess, and considering that it is not those who love God, but those who love him above all things,—not those who hate wickedness, but those who hate it more than any of the evils that can be avoided by it,—not those in whom good principles exist and operate, but those in whom they direct and govern, who are those righteous men who will enjoy eternal life. It is a very common observation, "that it is the ruling passion that denominates the character." The ruling love of power denominates a man ambitious,—the ruling love of praise, a vain man,—the ruling love of pleasure, a man of pleasure,—the

ruling love of money a covetous man, — and in like manner, the ruling love of righteousness denominates a righteous man.

3dly. I have mentioned that the superior efficacy of good principles within us must be manifested by avoiding all known and habitual guilt, and practising all known duties. The strength of inward principles is only to be determined by their effects on our conduct, and the necessary effect of the principles of virtue on our conduct is that now mentioned, if they exist in their due strength; and whoever he be that allows himself in the neglect of any important duty which he knows he ought to discharge, or in the commission of any known crime, every such person (though in other respects he may possess many good-qualities) wants true goodness; a regard to his duty has not its due force on his heart, and it is evident concerning him that he is under a different government from that of reason and conscience. The duties we are to discharge, and the sins we are to avoid, are divided into those respecting God and ourselves. A virtuous man makes conscience of discharging equally all those duties, and of avoiding all those sins.

I am here led to take notice of two extremes into which we are in danger of falling, both of them common and both pernicious. One is the extreme into which those persons fall who magnify moral and social duties, and who think that because in the general course of their lives they endeavour to perform those duties, and are harmless, peaceable, friendly, sober, and honest, they are safe and happy; while at the same time they are conscious of disregarding the duties of piety, and neglecting the worship and homage due to the Deity. These persons, as far as their conduct in social life is unexceptionable, are greatly to be esteemed and admired. But should they not reflect that their duty to man is not their whole duty? that there is a God who made them, who claims their first regard, and that by neglecting Him they render themselves blameable, and contract a guilt, which, as far as it is indulged and continued in, can no more be consistent with the superiority of good principles within us than any other instance of known and deliberate guilt.

It is impossible to observe without grief that irreligion which now prevails in this

kingdom, among even persons of decent and reputable characters. Many of these never think of worshipping the Being who made and preserves them, and who guides all events. They live as without God in the world. There is surely a gross and fundamental defect in their characters, and though not so faulty as gross immorality, it is an introduction to it, and very often terminates in it. For that decency of conduct and regard to honour in social transactions, which wants the aid and spirit of religion, is not likely to be very stable or uniform. Remember, then, that the addition of religion to morality is necessary to true virtue.

I need not here recite to you the particulars of the duties we owe to God. The chief of them are the reverential love of him, — resignation to his will, — trust in his goodness, — the imitation of his perfections, and prayer to him in private, in public, and in our families. That morality is miserably deficient which is not accompanied with the discharge of these duties. In truth, a regard to the Deity ought to go with us through every transaction of life; it ought to be the animating principle in all our virtuous actions.

But there is another branch of duty which it is proper for me to mention here. I would distinguish it by giving it the appellation of *Christian* duty, and I mean by it that duty which results from our particular situation as Christians, and the relations in which we stand to Christ as the founder of Christianity, — the Mediator between God and man, — the Prophet who came into the world to teach us God's will, — the Deliverer who died for us, — the Saviour who has rescued us from death, and raised us to the hope of a blessed immortality, and the Lawgiver and Judge who is hereafter to distribute rewards and punishments to all mankind according to their works. It would be folly to pretend that relations so important do not lay us under particular obligations, or that they can be innocently neglected. We ought therefore to join the discharge of those duties with the other duties of religion, by directing our views to Christ, as being that to us which the gospel reveals him to be, and which God has made him to be,—by honouring and loving him as our Lord and Saviour,—by keeping his sayings, and complying with his institutions. Such are the duties incumbent upon us in addition to private and social duties,

and a faithful attention to which is necessary to complete the character of a righteous man and sound christian.

You should recollect on this occasion that our Lord makes loving our neighbour as ourselves subordinate to that of loving God with all our hearts, and with all our strength, which he calls the first and great commandment; and also that he declares this to be eternal life, "knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent;" and that his apostles are constant and zealous in representing "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ as the grand terms of the covenant of grace." But I have said enough of the extreme into which those persons fall who confine their attention to morality without regarding religion. The other extreme, which I proposed to mention is that into which those fall who confine their attention to religion and faith, without duly regarding morality. This is by far the most pernicious error of the two, and nothing is more to be lamented than that there should be so many who fall into it, and pretend to be zealous for God and Christ, and all positive and christian duties, but at the same time

want zeal for honour, and integrity of conduct in social life. We all know that there are many who would not on any account neglect prayer, break the sabbath, or omit a sacrament, who yet will not scruple what is worse, I mean over-reaching and cheating, defaming, lying, and slandering. What can be more inconsistent, what more shameful than this? Have such persons never attended to St. Paul's declaration, that "now remaineth faith, hope and charity; but that the greatest of these three is charity?" Can they be ignorant that our Saviour has told them that "the weightier matters of the law are justice, truth, and fidelity, and that these things they ought to do, not leaving the others undone?" Do they not know, that it is the design of religion to mend us in every relation,—to make us better masters and better servants, better parents and better children, and more industrious, peaceable, generous and worthy; and that a profession of religion which does not produce this effect, only renders us more inexcusable and wicked. Let none of us then think of any thing so monstrous as a separation from one another of religion and morality. If they are not united, we can at best possess only a partial goodness, and no such good-

ness will be accepted. I say not however that such goodness can be of no use to us. God will, it is certain, distinguish between bad and worse, as well as between good and bad; and any degree of virtue in our character, however defective, will produce at least this good effect; it will (so far as it is possessed) lessen the weight of our guilt, and consequently of our future condemnation. But, brethren, no religious goodness but that which is commanding and prevalent, which extends its influence to our whole duty, and which excludes all indulged and habitual vice,—no religious goodness but this can denominate us righteous men. St. James tells us, that he who keeps the whole law, and offends in one point, (that is, deliberately and statedly,) is guilty of all. He that is honest and kind and faithful, but at the same time a drunkard, a gamester, or a scoffer at religion, is an enslaved sinner as really as if he sinned in more points; and the same is true of him who prays and fasts, and attends divine ordinances, but is not honest, kind, and faithful. The reason of this is plainly, that an allowed breach of any one of God's laws, or indulgence of any one bosom vice demonstrates that the balance of the internal powers is on the side of vice,

and that if such a person had equal temptations to offend in other instances, he would do it, and become abandoned.

I hope you will not mistake me on this subject. What I am now insisting upon is totally different from an exemption from every fault. God forbid that this should be necessary. It is an entire character that is necessary, not a perfect character. Our virtue in order to be genuine must be uniform and consistent; but it does not follow from hence that it can never admit of any thing irregular in the temper or conduct. Some infirmities will cleave to the best men, while they continue in this world. It is impossible that our passions should be so far conquered as that they shall never hurry us to any thing that our hearts shall disapprove. This would imply a total and complete conquest, to which, God knows, we are not equal. An enemy may be subdued perfectly, though still possessed of power enough to raise disturbances, and to give much trouble. In short, what constitutes true goodness is the supremacy of good principles, manifested by a prevailing and universal obedience, and a freedom from all indulged and habitual sin. Wherever this

supremacy exists, there exists a virtuous character, though it may be attended with many weaknesses and infirmities. Of this supremacy there are numberless degrees, and these degrees are what makes a virtuous character more or less virtuous, and consequently more or less amiable and excellent.

This leads me to the 4th particular, which I have mentioned as included in true virtue, and that is a constant endeavour to get better. Though we cannot attain to perfection, yet we must aim at it. He that rests in the goodness he possesses, and thinks that he is good enough, is most probably not good at all. He that in a virtuous course has no higher ambition than just to get within the gates of heaven, will probably never get there. Temptations may sometimes find a good man off his guard, and his passions may mislead him. But whenever this happens, he studies immediately to recover the ground he has lost. He is put upon greater watchfulness, and he is always mourning over the remains of moral imperfection within him, and labouring to remove them. Such is the nature of true goodness; and now let us for a few moments turn

our reflections on ourselves, and examine our own state.

Would you know to which class of men you belong?—the good or the bad,—the righteous, or the wicked? Consider whether the particulars I have been explaining are united in your characters; consider whether you are actuated by virtuous principles,—whether their efficacy is superior to the efficacy of any other principles,—and whether this superiority shews itself by right conduct, and an endeavour to be continually improving. Consider in particular whether there is any one evil passion or criminal habit that governs your resolutions, and is above the controul of conscience? Whether, though you are not free from every *fault*, yet you are free from every *vice*? Whether, though your obedience is not sinless, yet it is sincere and uniform? Whether, though you cannot say that you never sin, yet you can say that you do not live in any course of sin? Whether you discharge your duty to God and man and yourselves,—add morality to religion, and religion to morality; are charitable, compassionate, and faithful, as well as devout and pious, and maintain a regard to the peculiar duties which

your knowledge and profession of Christianity require from you?

To this examination of yourselves, permit me now at the conclusion of this discourse earnestly to exhort you. It is impossible that any thing should be of more consequence to you. All that is valuable to you depends on the issue of such an examination. Self-deceit is very common. Mistakes in this case are very dangerous, and many will be undone by neglecting to examine themselves, and indulging careless and false hopes. Consider particularly that an awful period approaches, when according to the representation of which my text is a part, every man's work and character will be tried, in order to a determination of his final lot. Does it not become us to ask ourselves how we are likely then to appear? Is it not proper that we should anticipate that period by now trying ourselves? Is it not sad that we should be capable of being so indolent as we are, when we know not how soon death and judgment may come upon us, and eternity receive us? What considerate person can help lamenting the inadvertency and sloth which prevail in the world? These men believe not that a

state of just retribution is near them; or (if they did) would they not, if in their senses, examine how they stand with respect to it? Would they not do this seriously, carefully, and immediately? Self-enquiry is the proper employment of a reasonable being, and nothing can render it disagreeable but the fear of making discoveries that will shew us our ill state. And is it not better that this should be discovered now, when it may be remedied, than hereafter when it will be too late?

Let us, then, brethren, think of our ways, and live no longer in darkness about our characters and expectations. Let us now resolve that we will for the future study ourselves more, and never give way to carelessness and sloth. Happy are those who are often making the enquiries I have proposed, and continually watching their characters, — who possess the comfort and triumph which arises from finding (upon making such enquiries) that all is well with them, — that they are the children of grace, the true disciples of Christ, and the heirs of everlasting glory! This must give a new relish to all their present enjoyments, — make afflictions light,

and reduce this vain world to nothing in their estimation. God grant that this may be our happiness, and that no one of us may lack any thing necessary to his acceptance. *Let us follow peace with all men, and wisdom, without which no one shall see the Lord, looking diligently* (as St. Paul speaks) *lest through some root of bitterness remaining within us, any of us should fail of the grace of God.*

SERMON XIV.

ON THE EVIL OF SIN.

PROVERBS, xiv. 9.

Fools make a mock at sin.

I KNOW of no better way to prove the evil of sin than by giving an account of the nature of it. We have indeed no other enemy under God's government but this, and did we possess our minds with just ideas of its malignity, or properly understand what it is, it would be impossible for us to make light of it, or not to study earnestly to avoid it.

In the following particulars I shall endeavour to comprize all that is most necessary to remember in considering what sin is, and by

attending to them we may, I think, be able to fix in our minds a deep sense of its evil.

In the first place we must consider sin as a transgression of the eternal laws of truth and righteousness. These are moral obligations or laws of rectitude which are founded in the nature of things, and result necessarily from the different relations of agents and objects. They have the same origin with the self-existent reason of the Deity, and cannot possibly be destroyed by any power, or even dispensed with for a moment in any part of the universe. They are of the same force in all times and places, and bind alike all rational beings. They are in particular the rule and measure of all the actions of the Deity. By them his will is always guided, and according to them He governs the world. They are therefore in the highest degree sacred and awful. To sin is to act in contradiction to them, and therefore it is striking at what is most of all important and sacred. It is to set up our own will in opposition to the unalterable nature of things. It is to do what eternal truth and reason forbid. It is to transgress those rules of rectitude and equity to which all creatures are placed in subjection,

and by which the Creator himself always acts.

2dly. Sin is contrary to the order and constitution of the world. It is very evident that He who made the world and established the present constitution of nature, intended that righteousness should be practised, and that this should be the law of the creation. Then only are beings and agents what they should be, when the moral differences of things are complied with; — when the rules of equity and justice are observed, and all minds pay homage to the obligation of virtue. To sin therefore is to counteract the plan of nature, and to break the order of the universe.

3dly. Sin is contrary to every person's private judgment and conviction. It is doing what the sinner knows he ought not to do, and what he condemns and hates himself for doing. It is disobedience to the dictates of our consciences, and offering violence to our best and highest powers.

From hence, 4thly, it follows, that sin is contrary to the will of the Deity. He is himself righteous, and therefore he must com-

mand righteousness. By making things to be what they are, — by establishing the present order of the world, — by giving us our rational and moral natures, and placing us in the relations in which we find ourselves, He has in the clearest manner signified that it is His will that we should acknowledge in our actions things to be what He has made them — that we should discharge those duties which result from the relations in which He has has placed us, and pursue that course of conduct to which we are called by the consciences He has given us. He who practises virtue obeys this will of the Deity, and walks in the way marked out to him by his Creator: but he who sins wilfully, offends and affronts the Deity by counteracting and disobeying Him. His language is, "I will not have God to reign over me, or regard His law." It is impossible there should be a worse aggravation than this of the evil of sin. By it we resist that will which reared the universe, and rise up in rebellion against Omnipotence.

It implies ingratitude to the Author of all happines — a base abuse of his goodness — sedition under his government, and a defiance of his holiness and justice. Thus then we see

that sin is 1st, a contradiction to truth and right. 2dly, A contradiction to the constitution of nature. 3dly, A contradiction to the frame and feelings of our minds; and lastly, a contradiction to the nature and will of the eternal Deity. In other words, it is the absurdity of attempting to make things to be what they cannot be — the presumption of opposing ourselves to the order by which the world subsists — the madness of violating our inward convictions, and the impiety of withdrawing ourselves from our allegiance to God, and throwing contempt on his sovereign authority. Such is sin in its *nature*. I will next desire your attention, while I endeavour to shew what it is in its *consequences*.

It is easy to see that what implies so much evil in its nature must be productive of equal evil in its effects. From a root so deadly must be derived fruits proportionably deadly. I might here say all in one sentence, by observing, "that it is the sole cause of all that is evil in nature." There is nothing else to which this term can be properly applied, or which is a reasonable object of aversion. But it is necessary that I should be more particular on this subject.

1st. Sin has the most pernicious effect on our minds. It pollutes and injures them in the worst manner. Then only is the soul in its right state, when the faculty of reason preserves its superiority over our other faculties, or when our different affections are not only rightly balanced with respect to one another, but all subject to the direction and controul of conscience. Sin destroys this inward order. It places the passions on the throne of reason. It elevates the lowest, and degrades and enslaves our highest powers. That part of our nature which is immortal and divine, it renders subservient to the brutal and abject part. It distorts therefore the constitution of man, and introduces into it confusion, tumult, and disease; the consequence of which must be, pain and torture. A vicious soul has quitted a natural and sound, for an unnatural and depraved state. It is unclean, self-accusing, and impotent. It has lost order, health, and dignity, and with these must be lost, peace and bliss. A reasonable being living in contradiction to the remonstrances of his reason, and opposing his will to the nature of things, must be as wretched and miserable as he is deformed and monstrous. Every act of iniquity gives

the soul a dreadful wound. He that in any instance goes contrary to his sense of moral good and evil, lays the foundation of unspeakable trouble. But indulged iniquity and all habits of moral evil lay waste all that is lovely and beautifying within us, and if retained, must produce irretrievable ruin. If you would have a more just sense of what I am now saying, think of those pitiable creatures, so common in this world, who have no other guide of life but blind appetite, who are torn by passion, distracted by malice, envy, pride, or ambition,—conscious of ill desert, at variance with themselves, condemned by their own hearts, and full of forebodings of future punishment. What creatures can you imagine more loathsome, or more wretched?

You should remember here that our minds are *ourselves*, and that on this account sin, by injuring our minds, injures ourselves in a more just and proper sense than any thing else. Disease only injures our bodies: Scandal only injures our good name, and worldly losses and disappointments only affect our fortunes. But they will not, except it be our own fault, do the least harm to what is pro-

perly ourselves. Nothing but sin can do this, and in this lies the difference between it and all besides that is called evil. While other evils reach no further than those objects which are external to us, and the appendages of our being, sin reaches the soul itself, and plants in it darkness, tumult, and death. Other evils are so only in appearance, and for a time. If they are real evils, it is because they are blended with the evil of sin. Disappointments in our pursuits, and distresses of fortune may in the end prove to be the greatest blessings.

It may be well for us that we have been sick, or poor, or defamed; but it can never be well for us that we have violated our consciences, and acted basely. Vice, in the idea of it, is nothing but debasement, folly, weakness, and misery. It is therefore really and unalterably evil. It must prove the bane and curse of every mind as far as it is admitted; and the contrary is just as impossible as that causes should not produce their genuine effects, that fire should not burn, or that poison should not destroy. It may be proper to add, that sin necessarily alienates the mind from God, deprives it of his favor, and cuts it

off from the only rest and stay of reasonable beings. There is an essential repugnance between the nature of God and every kind of moral evil. He can have no pleasure in iniquity. It is (to use the language of one of the prophets) *the abominable thing his soul abhorred.* Light and darkness, spotless purity and turpitude, must be the same, before a vicious soul can have any communion with him. Sin therefore brings upon our minds the shocking calamity of wanting the protection of their Maker, of losing fellowship with the cause of all happiness,—of being under the displeasure of God, and having him for their enemy.

Such are the effects of sin on the soul of man. Let us next consider its effects on the world around us. Of other systems and the universe at large we can know little. There is, however, one important circumstance relating to them which we are capable of discovering with certainty: I mean, that in whatever part of the world, or among whatever systems of beings, the obligations of righteousness are disregarded, this order is subverted, and the foundations of happiness are destroyed. This is a truth that is taught

us clearly by our ideas of the natures of things; nor is there perhaps a more proper method of gaining a just sense of the evil of sin than by reflecting, that were it to spread through this wide and fair creation, it would blast all its glory, tarnish all its beauty, and convert it into a dark and dreary chaos.

But the general prevalence of sin through nature is an event which we may be assured can never happen under God's government. We know, however, that the councils of Providence do not require the total prevention of it; for there is one part of nature into which it has been permitted to enter. We see that among mankind all flesh have corrupted their ways and come short of the glory of God. Let us then, on this occasion, take a view of the general condition of man. What a scene of tumult and war is this earth? Who can think without pain of the labours, diseases, and sorrows which diminish human happiness? How is civil society continually distracted by feuds and dissensions? How are the annals of past time filled with accounts of fertile provinces laid waste, and kingdoms overturned? Of bloody battles and horrid slaughter, — of seditions, disasters, and tra-

gical revolutions? How have the best blessings of life been converted into the worst curses?—order into licentiousness,—government into despotism,—and religion into a gloomy and vicious superstition? Some pine away in poverty,—some are racked by excruciating torments. Some rave in the cells of lunacy,—and some are rotting and perishing in loathsome dungeons. Here a band of oppressors with haughty insolence tread on those below them. There a body of revolters rise up in their own defence, and hurl vengeance on their tyrants. Here an army of invaders attack the innocent and peaceful, destroy their dwellings, and involve a happy people in desolation and carnage. There a famine or pestilence spreads terror every where, and depopulates a nation. In one country a king destroys the civil rights of men, and sacrifices millions to his folly, his pride, or his avarice. In another, a priest destroys their religious rights; and in many countries the power of both unites in upholding and enforcing error, in persecuting the sincere enquirer after truth, and in enslaving the human race.

But it is neither agreeable nor necessary to

proceed with this detail. I have entered upon it only to draw your attention to the origin of all these evils. Did mankind pay a proper regard to the obligations of righteousness, human affairs would wear a very different face, and this earth would be the seat of undisturbed enjoyment and happiness.

God is the best as well as the greatest of beings, and the parent of nothing but good. It is sin (that is, our own faulty choice) that has brought forth evil. It is this that, by counteracting the Deity, renders human life miserable, and fills it with groans and lamentations. This is the enemy that points the arrows of adversity, that arms the elements against us, that racks the body with pain, and wrings the heart with anguish. This is the incendiary that kindles the flames of war, that embroils society, and that stirs up ambition and pride to depopulate and ravage the world. This is the bitter fountain of every danger that threatens you, of every calamity you fear, of every tear you shed, and every pain you suffer; and if you would acquire a just sense of its malignant nature, gather together all the heart-aches, the vexations, the cares, the confusion, the agonies and dis-

tresses which it has occasioned among mankind. Could you do this fully, or trace in a proper manner the calamities of mankind to their sources in their follies and crimes, you could not but be penetrated with the most overwhelming sense of its evil.

But we must not stop here. All that we now see of the effects of sin, is but the beginning of the misery annexed to it. In this world there are many causes which prevent it from being always followed by its proper consequences. Though in general miserable, and often extremely so, yet it never produces its full effects. The complete infliction of the punishment due to it is reserved for another world. There the wicked will be gathered into one place, where they will be made examples of divine justice. Could I properly represent to you the horrors of that world where joy is never known, and where hope never comes, I should have it in my power to convince you effectually of the evil of sin. But I cannot dwell on such a subject. The sum of what has been said of the effects of sin is this: It makes the soul the slave of vile passions, and the seat of anarchy, remorse, and shame. It darkens, pollutes, and debases

the human mind. It separates man from God, brings his displeasure upon him, and destroys all his hopes. It violates those laws of righteousness by which Nature subsists, and it would, were it to become prevalent, overturn all order, destroy all happiness, and involve the creation in one common ruin.

After this account of sin, I need not ask you whether it is not folly in the extreme to make a mock at it? May God impress upon our hearts a due sense of the truths which have now been delivered, and lead us to such a hatred of sin as shall engage us in our future conduct to flee from all the approaches to it, and to make this the only object of our anxious concern and study.

SERMON XV.

ON THE EVIL OF SIN.

PROVERBS xiv. 9.

"*Fools make a mock at sin.*"

IN a former discourse I endeavoured to represent the evil of sin, and in doing this I represented it as contrary to the eternal difference of moral good and evil — as inconsistent with the plan and constitution of Nature — as a violence offered to our inward feelings and convictions — as disobedience to the Sovereign of the world — as our debasement and misery — and as destructive to the order and welfare of the creation.

Upon considering this subject, it is a very natural enquiry, "whence came this evil, and

why is it not excluded from the world?" "Is not the Deity almighty, and able to exclude it, and is he not also perfectly benevolent and willing to exclude it?" These are enquiries which offer themselves unavoidably to all thinking persons, and which in all ages have puzzled human wisdom. Perhaps we have not faculties for understanding the full answer to them, and for my own part I am very willing in this instance to acquiesce in my own ignorance. I see in the constitution of Nature traces of benevolence and depths of wisdom which exceed unspeakably my comprehension, and which leave me no room to doubt but that the Author of nature is supremely benevolent and wise. I am not very anxious about knowing more than this. All the appearances that puzzle me I ascribe without hesitation to my imperfect knowledge, partial views, and disadvantageous situation. I know that in an extensive and complicated plan, contrived by infinite wisdom, there must be many things that the reason of man cannot explain or account for. What would in truth form the strongest objection, and appear most of all unaccountable, would be, that creatures who are but of yesterday, who see but a small part of God's works, and know almost

nothing of the history of the universe; — what, I say, would be most of all unaccountable would be, that such creatures should be proper judges of the works of God, or find themselves capable of discovering blemishes and defects in that order and wisdom of Nature, to which they owe their existence, and from which they derive all their wisdom. I pity the men who believe they have these capacities, and who have pretended to point out instances in which Nature has erred, or might have been better contrived. This is worse than folly. It is intolerable arrogance and presumption. Till they are wise enough to make a world, they should not take upon them to mend a world. Till they can find one production in Nature which discovers no more skill in its structure than they can explain, they should not erect themselves into judges of the structure of the universe, or pretend to be able to correct the councils and dispensations of Providence. Were we competent judges of the ways and government of the Deity, or could we discover real faults in them, or conceive improvements of them, the consequence would be, that they are derived from an intelligence and knowledge inferior to our own; or in other words, that the effect

exceeds the cause, and that a reptile in the dust is more wise and good than the being who made it, and who is the spring of all knowledge and goodness.

There cannot be a greater absurdity than this. The same incomprehensible wisdom that we know to be displayed in the frame of every beast, and bird, and vegetable, we may be assured is displayed in the frame of intelligent beings, the order of providence, and the government of events. Amidst all that appears mysterious to us we may rest our souls on this joyful truth, that *all is well in nature*, or at least so far well that it is not possible for us to see or conceive how things might have been better. With respect therefore in particular to the introduction of evil into the world, we may know (whether able to account for it or not) that it must be right. But we need not rest the solution of this difficulty entirely on our ignorance. We are not in this instance quite in the dark, nor is it necessary that we should content ourselves with a confidence entirely implicit. There are several considerations, which may help us in some measure to account for the admission of evil, and which have a tendency to shew that it is

consistent with infinite wisdom and goodness. I should be carried too far into a very abstruse speculation were I here to say much. I shall therefore desire your attention only to the following considerations:

1st. It should be considered that the creation of free agents, that is, of beings endued with active and self-directing powers, is absolutely necessary to the production of the greatest happiness; such powers being the foundation of all virtue and merit, and consequently of all rational and moral happiness. Infinite goodness therefore required the communication of such powers, and by requiring these it required also that scope should be given for exerting them. To create free agents without granting them a sphere of agency; or to communicate powers, and at the same time to leave no room for their exertion, is an inconsistency which cannot be supposed of infinite wisdom. As far as moral agents have no command over events, or are not permitted to act as they please, so far they have no powers, and lose the capacity of rendering themselves praise-worthy and useful, and of acquiring that good desert which is the chief ground of honour and dig-

nity among intelligent beings, and the necessary recommendation to favor under God's government; and a system of such beings would be only a system of passive instruments void of value, and incapable of the highest enjoyments.

It should never be forgotten, that moral agency implies, in the very notion of it, the capacity of acting wrong as well as right, and that there cannot be true virtue without the power of being vicious, or good desert without the power of contracting ill desert. The possibility therefore of the introduction of moral evil is the necessary consequence of granting moral powers; nor could it have been excluded in any other way than either by not granting such powers, or by restraining the exercise of them. In this way indeed evil might have been excluded; but in this way would have been excluded also all that is most worthy and honourable in the creation, and therefore it is a way of preventing one evil by producing an infinitely greater. In the same manner exactly a civil government might prevent the commission of crimes in a state by shutting men up in their houses, or tying their hands and feet. But no civil

government can ever think of any such measure, because with evil it would exclude all good, and destroy the very being of civil society.

It may, I know, be objected that free agents might have been produced, and a scope for agency given them without the actual introduction of evil into the world; because they might have been formed with such dispositions, and placed in such circumstances, as would have exempted them from temptation, and secured their right conduct in every instance, and thus prevented, though not the possibility, yet all the danger, and consequently the reality of moral evil.

In answer to this, it may deserve to be considered, whether in the infancy of intelligent beings, and before they have obtained any security from experience and habits, there must not always be some danger of deviation. But waving this, I am ready to acknowledge that it is indeed possible to place intelligent beings at the commencement of their existence in such a state as shall secure their innocence. But then, it is scarcely conceivable that such a state could be a state

of trial and discipline, and we do not know how proper it may be that intelligent beings should at first pass through this, and be made to rise gradually to higher degrees of perfection and bliss, in consequence of having been educated for them, and rendered themselves worthy of them in such a preparatory state as this life is to mankind. Supposing, however, neither of these observations a sufficient answer to the present objection, it may at least be said, that it implies a limitation of the goodness of God; for to say that God should have placed all beings in states so disposed as to exclude all the danger, arising from their free agency, of moral evil, is the same as to say that he should have created only the highest order of intelligent beings. But the truth is, that the ends of goodness required the creation of the lower as well as the higher orders of creatures. This is necessary to establish a contingency in the states of beings, and to give scope for the exercise of virtue and beneficence in the universe; and by this means to give to beings the capacity of a god-like dignity and bliss, by doing good to one another. It is further extremely plain, that goodness is more displayed by bringing into existence every dif-

ferent order of beings that are capable of happiness, than by bringing into existence only the highest orders.

This then being the truth, and a variety of orders of beings, together with a precariousness in their states, being necessary to the greatest happiness, it follows that it was necessary to produce the more defectible, as well as the less defectible beings, and that somewhere or other in the scale of existence there must be introduced such a being as man. But I shall not proceed further with a discussion so perplexed and difficult. We see evil in the world, and we have every reason to believe that the permission of it is the result of the wisest councils. Amidst the difficulties that occur to us in contemplating it, let us remember that it is permitted only for a time. We may be assured that it will, some time or other, be exterminated; that God will take effectual care of the order of his works, and that reason and righteousness will at last (under his superintendency) triumph over folly and vice. A period is coming when all the powers of wickedness shall be broken, and the devil and all his works be destroyed.

We are apt to be impatient and hasty. It is proper that the tares and the wheat should at present be suffered to grow together, because the one cannot be rooted up without rooting up the other. At the time of harvest the tares shall be gathered together, and burned with unquenchable fire, while the precious wheat shall be preserved and gathered, as our Saviour speaks, into God's barn. This will be the issue of all present events. This is the awful catastrophe towards which we are tending. The future punishment of the wicked will exhibit a dreadful warning to the world, and magnify the holiness of the Deity. Good therefore will arise out of present evils and we shall find reason to cry out with extacy, "Oh the depths of the wisdom and goodness of God." In short, let us do our duty, and avoid the evil that is in the world, and we shall soon be witnesses to a glorious revolution, and know "that verily there is a God who judges in the earth, and who will make it infinitely happy."

There are many practical reflections and inferences which naturally offer themselves on the subject of this and my former discourse.

To some of these I shall now desire your serious attention.

1st. The account which has been given of the evil of sin has a tendency to recommend to our approbation and belief the scripture history. This history makes the most striking representation of the evil of sin. Every part of it inculcates this upon us. The grand lesson it teaches us is this. All the calamities which it relates are referred to sin as their origin. God's hatred of sin and love of righteousness it describes as the principles which guide him in the government of the world; and from hence it derives every dispensation of his providence, and all the revolutions that happen. In this respect it differs totally and remarkably from all other histories; and he who believes it, and duly attends to it, cannot but receive the deepest impression of this truth, "that sin is the parent-evil which produces other evils, and gives them their force and pungency.

Has the human species fallen into distress? Have we been degraded from a state more perfect and happy, to the present state of labour, temptation, and hazard? The scrip-

ture-history not only tells us the fact, but assures us that it has had no other cause than sin. Does death hold mankind in bondage, and lay waste the earth? It informs us that *sin first entered the world, and with it came death, and so death passed upon all men*, Rom. v. 12. Did an universal deluge sweep off the whole race of mankind except eight persons? The scriptures tell us that it was a judgment of God upon mankind for their wickedness. Did an eruption of fire from the bowels of the earth destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, and convert an extensive and fruitful country into a smoking lake? The scriptures tell us that it was owing to the sins of the inhabitants, and that had there been but ten righteous persons left among them, they would have been spared. Does the devouring sword or a desolating pestilence spread havock and misery through a town or a kingdom? The scriptures never mention such an event without ascribing it to the displeasure of the Deity against wickedness. In short, this sacred history, from the beginning to the end of it, is nothing but one uniform exhibition of the evil of sin, the importance of virtue, and the justice of the supreme Governor.

But 2dly, since sin is so great an evil, we have no reason to be surprised at the severity of the future punishment threatened to it. The language in which this punishment is expressed in the scriptures cannot be repeated without pain. The whole of it is expressed by our Saviour in the sentence which he has told us he will hereafter pronounce on the wicked. *Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* Almost every word in this sentence carries terror with it. A proper explanation of it cannot be given. It implies the infliction of the greatest calamity that can befall a reasonable being, and we may easily see that it may be a right and necessary infliction. I have shewn you what an evil sin is, and what would be its effects were it to prevail through nature. It must therefore be restrained and discountenanced. A vengeance upon it must be taken suitable to its malignity, and in every region of the world it is necessary that it should be followed with a curse that may deter from the practice of it. Without this, the ends of goodness cannot be obtained. Without this, the order of the world cannot be preserved, or nature subsist. In a word, as long as God is either just

or wise or benevolent, he must guard his works against this evil by punishing it in an exemplary manner.

3dly. As sin is so great an evil, we ought to consider how thankful we should be to God for the hope he has given us in the gospel of the pardon of it. If we truly repent we are assured we shall be received to favor, and not only delivered from the punishment due to our sins, but made completely happy. This benefit we owe to that love of God which sent Christ into the world to save us. It is a benefit of infinite value, and it demands our warmest praises. Let us adore that sovereign grace which has thus distinguished us, extended mercy to us notwithstanding our numberless transgressions, and after we had made ourselves guilty and unworthy, lifted us to the hope of eternal life and happiness.

4thly. From the account I have given of the evil of sin, we may learn the presumption of those persons who imagine they can atone for it and deliver themselves from its consequences by the tricks of superstition. I have just observed that pardon is offered to sin-

ners; but it is offered only upon the condition of such a repentance as causes us to forsake sin, and produces a thorough reformation of life. To expect to be saved from the misery of sin, in any way but this, argues folly unspeakable; nor can any thing be more melancholy than that such an expectation should be so prevalent as it is in all religions. In truth, the religion of a great part of mankind is little more than a system of ceremonies, by exactness in which they hope to compound for vice. In Popish countries particularly, men are taught a way of recommending themselves to favour by telling beads, by adorning the shrines of saints, and ridiculous penances and mortifications; and even among ourselves in this Protestant and enlightened country, there are many, I am afraid, who seriously believe they can make amends for defects of temper and wrong practices by ritual services, and a careful observance of the outward forms of piety. Let us be on our guard against this most pernicious error. Let us remember, that a religion that does not free us from the power of sin can never deliver us from its punishment. Let us remember that the use of charms to relieve us under this evil will

render our condition more desperate, and that in this instance there is no antidote but expelling the poison, which if retained must destroy.

Once more, let me desire you to reflect what reason we have for sorrow that we have ever practised this evil. To think that we have opposed ourselves to the obligations of righteousness, counteracted the order of nature, and offered violence to our consciences; or to think that we have disobeyed the Deity, abused his goodness, and made ourselves enemies to the happiness of his works, — to reflect on our deformity, baseness, and wretchedness, as sinful creatures, — with what pungent grief and contrition ought this to fill us? How ought it to make us despise and loath ourselves? Did we see sin in its true colours, or could we properly represent to ourselves the opposition it makes to all that is decent and reasonable, — the dishonour it brings upon us, — the stain it leaves in the soul, — the offence it gives to the Almighty, the injury it does to the creation, and the shocking ruin to which it exposes us; — could we, I say, properly represent all this to ourselves, it would not be possible for us to

avoid feeling the sharpest anguish under the consciousness of what we have done amiss, and crying out with anxiety, "*Oh miserable men that we are.*"

But let not any sincere penitent give way to despondence. I have just observed that forgiveness and favor are offered to every contrite sinner. *God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing to them their trespasses.* Though we have drank this deadly poison, we may yet be saved. Though we have incurred the displeasure of the Deity, he will have mercy upon us if we return to our duty, and forsake iniquity. To this, fellow-christians, let me now exhort you with serious earnestness. Hate sin, for there is nothing else hateful. Flee from sin, for there is nothing else that you have reason to fear. This is the evil that mingles misery with the portion of happiness allotted us, imbitters present enjoyment, and destroys future hope. Avoid it, then, and pray for God's grace to help you in this work. If you fail in this, it signifies nothing in what you succeed. Every step we take in guilt is an advance towards inevitable ruin. Every deviation from truth, and honour, and rectitude, is

a deviation from all that is desirable. Every thing done with an upbraiding heart is a shock given to our existence. Every wicked passion indulged is a viper taken into our bosoms, which if not thrown off, will sting us to death. We have no other enemy under God's government but sin, nor any thing else which stands in our way to bliss. God delights in the communication of happiness to his creatures. His goodness flows an inexhaustible stream to all fit objects, and nothing makes us unfit but the indulgence we give to sin. I say indulgence, for a freedom from all that is sinful is not required from us. The frailty of our natures does not admit of this. Good men will be sometimes unhappily misled by the deceitfulness of sin. But there is nothing sinful in which they allow themselves. There is no vicious habit that enslaves them, or evil passion that conquers them in the stated course of life. Happy are all of this character. They have no infirmities that are inconsistent with prevailing goodness and true sincerity, and therefore they will be accepted, and soon they shall be brought to that world where the being of sin within them will be destroyed, — where they shall attain to that perfection which they are now

labouring to acquire, and be for ever improving in virtue and felicity.

But what can be said of those who live in guilt and irreligion? what a shocking state are they in? what an enemy do they embrace? over what a precipice are they sleeping? They have their own judgments against them. They have all nature against them, with the order of which they are at variance. They have the Almighty against them, whose laws they break, and whose will they resist. How dreadful then must be their lot? Some of them will hereafter plead, "Lord, Lord, have we not eaten and drank in thy presence, and hast thou not taught in our streets? Have we not kept many a fast, offered up many a prayer, and received many a sacrament?" But no such pleas will be of any avail when judgment comes. The answer they shall receive will be, *Depart from me all ye that work iniquity.*

In short, none but God himself sees the whole importance and obligation of the laws of righteousness, and therefore none but God himself can understand the whole evil of departing from them.

To say no more, may God in mercy shew us more of the evil of sin, turn our feet to the paths of wisdom, and form us to that sublime temper which will cause all our fears to be swallowed up in the one fear of committing sin and offending God!

SERMON XVI.

ON THE ETERNAL HAPPINESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN A FUTURE STATE.

1 JOHN ii. 25.

"*And this is the Promise that he has promised, even Eternal Life.*"

MY design in this discourse is to endeavour to engage your attention to the nature and importance of that promise of eternal life which is mentioned in the words you have now heard. The word *eternal*, through frequent use, is so familiar to us that we generally pronounce it easily and lightly. But did we attend as we ought to the meaning of it, we could not but be deeply impressed and affected whenever we have occasion to mention it. Whoever indeed will take time to

consider what an eternal existence is, or to enter thoroughly into the reflection that he is designed for such an existence, or, if truly virtuous, that he is never more to die, but to continue in being through endless ages, the same conscious and living agent he is at present; whoever, I say, will take time to enter thoroughly into this reflection must find all his faculties overwhelmed; nor will it be very easy for him to persuade himself that it is possible that he should really have such a prospect before him. He will be disposed to think it too amazing. He will perhaps be led to consider that all about him is transitory and mortal, and that even the world itself must in time come to an end, and from hence he may be led to doubt whether there is not a particular incredibility in the doctrine, that he is himself so infinitely distinguished, as not only to be capable of, but designed for an existence that shall never come to an end.

I cannot be much better employed than in endeavouring to remove such doubts as these, by proving to you the credibility of that promise of eternal life mentioned in my text. After which I propose to proceed further in this subject, by insisting on one particular

fact concerning our future endless existence, which I shall prove to be necessarily connected with it. I mean the circumstance that it is to be an existence always improving. I will then make some observations on the striking and wonderful nature of such an expectation, and conclude with some practical inferences.

Let us 1st, consider what evidence there is for the credibility of the promise of eternal life or an endless future existence, mentioned in the words of my text.

Here I would desire you to consider particularly the nature of the human soul. It is a simple and indivisible substance, and therefore as such incorruptible. This is not true of our bodies, or of any of the sensible objects with which we are surrounded. These are all not one, but many substances united together, and forming particular compounds which, as such necessarily admit of division and dissolution. The world itself is only an assemblage of an inconceivable number of different beings and substances standing in particular relations to one another, and subject to particular laws. It has therefore in it the princi-

ples of decay, and must in time, like every work of human art, wear out and fall into destruction. That system to which we belong is a collection of bodies put together for particular ends, and when those ends are answered, and the limited period for which it was built is spent, it is proper it should be taken to pieces, and that new systems and new scenes and plans of being should succeed it. But nothing of this kind can be said of the human soul. It is not a machine consisting of a variety of parts, and therefore it does not admit of any separation of parts. It is not a compound of different substances, and therefore cannot have in it any of the principles of dissolution. All the deaths or dissolutions with which we are acquainted are a resolution of sensible objects or animal bodies into their component parts, each part still subsisting and only acquiring new relations and connections. The idea of death or dissolution is not therefore applicable to any object that is properly *one*, and consists not of parts. This is true in some degree even of matter. All the original and primary atoms, or particles of matter, are naturally incapable of ceasing to exist except by an exertion of that power which at first created them. None of the

changes and vicissitudes that are continually happening in nature, can have any other effect on those primary particles than to alter the circumstances of their existence by separating or uniting them in different ways, or by breaking particular combinations of them, and causing new combinations to arise. What is analagous to this may with much more reason and evidence be applied to the human soul. To suppose that the principle of consciousness within us may be split, or that it consists of a number of consciousnesses, some of which may reside in one place and some in another; this implies one of the most palpable impossibilities and contradictions. There is nothing that is so much of an unity as the soul of a man. The circumstances and qualities of its existence may be varied in numberless ways. The exercise of its powers may be disturbed in any degree, or even suspended for any time. But the subject of these powers must always remain and go on to exist independently of all changes, till there is a positive exertion of that power which brought it into being to put it out of being. This is a conclusion that cannot be evaded in any way except by maintaining that our souls are nothing but a result from a

certain configuration of parts, or particular modes of motion or organization. But this is so intolerably absurd that it does not deserve a serious answer. We cannot conceive of any thing so real or substantial as the principles which we call *ourselves.* If these are not beings but modes and fleeting forms and qualities, we can have no reason for thinking that there are any beings in nature. Or if (allowing that they are beings) they are not each of them unities, but a multitude of beings, there is an end of all truth and certainty, and we can pay no regard to any of our feelings or perceptions. The argument I am now insisting upon is of great importance on the present subject. Were it said of the frail structure of a flower that it would not perish, we could not possibly give our assent. But when this is said of such a substance as a diamond, our assent is easily gained. In like manner, were our souls nothing but modifications of figure and motion, or results from the organization of our bodies, they would be necessarily perishable and transitory, and it would be impossible to give any credit to the doctrine of their eternal existence. But as we know this not to be the case, — as the truth is, that our souls are

agents or substances, which on account of their simplicity are incapable of a separation of parts, and incorruptible and unperishable in their nature, — as, I say, this is the case, we see that they are not only capable of immortality, but that they will be actually immortal, if almighty power does not destroy them, and the doctrine therefore of their eternal existence appears to be highly credible. Some are disposed to consider body as the only substantial and durable reality. But there cannot be a much greater error. That sense within us which thinks and acts and reasons, and feels pain and pleasure, is without doubt the most substantial of all realities. There is in truth more reason for doubting whether matter is not a mode of spirit, than there is for doubting whether spirit is not a mode of matter. Mind is prior to body, and the cause of all its motions and properties. What is sensible and corporeal is less excellent than what is intellectual, and must possess a less firm and permanent existence. I might go on to enlarge here on the dignity of the soul of man and the noble nature of those faculties by which it perceives eternal truth, investigates the laws by which the universe is governed, and sees and

knows the self-existent and incomprehensible Deity.

'Our souls are indeed high and heaven-born principles, infinitely superior to senseless and torpid matter; rays from the eternal divinity and images of his supreme perfection. Shall it then be true, as I have before observed, of even an atom of matter, that it is naturally incorruptible and immortal, and shall not the same be true of the soul?—of that spiritual and living sense within us, which is the seat of all those high and noble powers of which we are conscious?

Let me desire you to consider in the next place, that the point on which I am insisting seems on some accounts to have a no less credibility than the doctrine of a future state in general. You should remember, that my design is not to prove the credibility of a future state, but the credibility of the particular circumstance relating to it,—"that it is to be eternal." There are many reasons which leave us but little room for doubting whether we are designed for an existence in another world. A future state of rewards and punishments has been from the creation the object

of general belief among mankind. The perfections of the Deity require that every person should receive according to his works strictly and invariably. And if this does not happen in the present world, the just conclusion is, that we are reserved for another scene of being, in which it shall happen. Now it must occur to every one, that if indeed this imperfect and mortal state is to be succeeded by another, it will be a more perfect state, and particularly a state of immortality. We know, as I have already shewn, the soul to be capable of a perpetual existence. We foresee but one event that seems to threaten its existence, and if it is to get the better of that event, we can scarcely avoid reckoning that it will afterwards go on to exist for ever.

After surviving the shock of death, it is natural to expect no more death. This, however, should be understood with limitations. We have reason to think that the wicked hereafter will be raised from death only to be fixed in a state where they shall suffer a second death. But this will be a punishment inflicted upon them for their sins, and perhaps it is in this case principally that the

destruction of reasonable beings takes place under the divine government. I am not indeed willing to think that such events are common in the universe, unless as punishments or exertions of justice on impenitent and hardened offenders. In this discourse I have the virtuous part of mankind only in view, and with respect to them the forfeiture of immortality by a course of guilt implies that they will be exempted, or that where reward and not punishment will be intended hereafter by the universal governor, there will not be any such calamity as a second death more dreadful than the present. I am sensible that the contrary to this may possibly be the fact. As God's power is continually exerted according to stated laws in bringing new beings into existence, so there may be laws according to which it is exercised in destroying beings.

This world might have been so contrived, as that all mankind, after an adequate retribution, should perish totally in death; and in like manner it is possible that our state of future existence may be such that after receiving according to the deeds done in the body we may all perish in a second death.

It cannot be shewn that there would be any thing inconsistent with God's moral perfections in this; no being having a right to everlasting existence, or indeed to any more than a difference between his state and that of other beings, suitable to the difference in his moral character. But though this, for ought we know, may have possibly been the actual constitution of the Deity, it is not that which we can look upon as the most credible.

The expectation of the total extinction of virtuous men, after being raised from death to enjoy a reward adequate to their present virtue: — this expectation, I say, cannot lay easy upon our minds; nor do I know of any thing that gives us any particular reason for entertaining it. What we are led on the contrary to presume is, that after being delivered from death we shall die no more, unless we have deserved it by wickedness. That capacity of an eternal existence which we have, seems to be an intimation to us from our Maker, that we shall actually enjoy it, if we do not render ourselves unworthy of it. This expectation exhibits the Deity more to us in the character of a perfectly benevolent as well as just Being. It is much more agreeable

to our ideas of almighty and everlasting wisdom and goodness, than the expectation of the universal extinction of reasonable beings, after enjoying a limited period of existence. Nothing is too much to be expected from infinite goodness. What an idea indeed does it give us of this attribute, to think of myriads of reasonable creatures, who in every moment of duration are brought into being to be happy, not for any limited period, but for ever. This is an exercise of goodness worthy of that incomprehensible Being who gave birth to the universe, and the end of whose universal government is universal happiness. There is something at which our minds must recoil in the notion that virtuous beings in a future state, after existing for some time in happiness, shall be struck out of existence. Why should this be done?—Not to display God's justice by extirpating from the creation vicious and worthless beings; for I am speaking only of virtuous and worthy beings. Nor could it be done for making room for other beings; for space is infinite, and therefore affords room for an infinite number of beings, and for all possible displays of benevolence. In truth the longer a virtuous being has existed, the more reason he seems to have for

expecting to be continued in existence. The longer he exists, the more improved in virtue he must be, — the more his usefulness and value in the creation must be, — the worthier object he must be of his Maker's favour, and consequently the more *fit* to be preserved. That in these circumstances the power of the Deity should be exerted to destroy him, — that at the very time when he is fittest for existence, and relishes it most, and is most approved by his Master, he should be cut off, and exterminated for ever; — this carries in it an appearance so harsh, that it cannot be received as likely without the aid of very strong arguments. And though, were it known to be indeed God's appointment, virtuous men (on account of their having enjoyed more happiness than they can claim) would still have reason for warm gratitude, yet the reflection on such an appointment would have a necessary tendency to damp their minds. The foresight of an end to the future bliss of heaven would necessarily render it so much less a heaven; and the greater the bliss was, and the longer it had been enjoyed, the more disagreeable would be such a prospect.

But not to dwell any longer on reasonings, which though probable, are undecisive, and cannot give the full conviction we wish for; let me now, in the last place, call for your attention to an evidence on this subject, which is plain and direct, and fitted to produce the strongest satisfaction. I mean the evidence arising from the assurances of the Christian revelation. This informs us in the plainest language, agreeably to the observations I have made, that the righteous shall be happy for ever, and that death and destruction are admitted under the divine government only as punishments. This is the promise, my text says, that God has promised, even eternal life. "Those who shall be accounted worthy, our Lord says, to obtain the resurrection from the dead, shall be like the angels, neither shall they die any more." Luke xx. 35. "God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish but have everlasting life." "This is the true bread that came down from heaven, and he that eateth of it shall live for ever." John vi. 18. "Into the heavenly city, described in the 21st chap. of the Revelations, shall be gathered all the nations of them

which are saved, that is, all the faithful and virtuous, and they shall reign, we are told, for ever and ever." Rev. xxii. 5. To the same purpose we read in 1st Peter, i. 4, "that we have been begotten again by the resurrection of Christ from the dead to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us." And in 2 Cor. v. 1, "that we have a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." And in Titus i. 2, "that we are heirs according to the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised."

Christianity informs us particularly on this subject, that we were originally made and intended for immortality, and that Jesus Christ appeared in the world to reinstate us in the hope of it. By him life and immortality have been brought to light. By him death has been destroyed, and all the righteous have obtained the hope of a future resurrection to a new life, — to a life that will be happy and glorious, — to a life that shall be continued through all duration, and never come to an end. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus

Christ." Rom. vi. 23. This is indeed a blessed hope, a hope agreeable (as I have endeavoured to shew) to our notions of God's boundless goodness, and of the capacities and dignity of the human soul. But it should never be forgotten, that the language of scripture limits it to men of virtuous characters. The wicked are not proper objects of such favour. They are not fit to be preserved in the creation. "All that are in their graves shall hereafter hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation." Both those, therefore, who do evil, and those who do good, will be raised up from death at the coming of Jesus Christ; but the one will rise to die again more dreadfully, the other will rise to die no more. Such will be the distinction which will be made between the righteous and the wicked. A distinction more important and awful than any words can describe, or any heart can conceive. A distinction which will display equally the wisdom and the goodness of the Deity, — his wisdom in dooming to perdition all the workers of iniquity, and his goodness in bestowing on those who work

righteousness a happiness that shall last throughout eternity.

Let us here pause a moment, and reflect more closely on what I am saying. If truly righteous, we are through the Redeemer of mankind to burst the bands of death at the last day, and to recover the exercise of our present powers. We are to enter upon a new state of being, where mortality shall be swallowed up of life, and the hand of death shall never reach us — where our happiness shall continue always undiminished, and our existence be commensurate with that of the everlasting Deity. Is not this indeed too vast a hope? What! to survive the sun and stars! to live for ever! — to exist in bliss beyond all the limits of time, and after being happy for myriads and myriads of ages to be no nearer to an end of our happiness than at the first moment when it begun? Can this be possible? Fellow-christians *it is* possible. The arguments I have offered prove it to be more than possible. They prove it to be *probable*, nay *certain*, if the gospel is true. But you may enquire further. Must not existence in time grow tiresome to us? After millions of ages have been spent, shall we not find employment

wanting for our faculties, and the funds of happiness be exhausted? These are enquiries which our present condition leads us to make. In this world most objects when they become familiar to us become insipid. Scenes which have lost their novelty lose likewise their relish; and after remaining a long time in any situation we are apt to grow impatient, and to wish for new scenes and employments. But we must not judge of our condition in another world by our condition in this. Our future state will be more improved and permanent. The impatience and weariness which we now feel are the effects of that mortality which is continually weighing us down. Our bodies soon wear out and decay. This affects our souls, and produces that satiety and disgust which are apt to attend a long life. But hereafter we shall be freed from all the incumbrances of flesh and blood, and shake off entirely all that is mortal, and the consequence of this must be, that we shall enjoy eternal health and vigour, and never more feel languor or fatigue.

The soul, I have shewn (however affected it may be in the exercise of its powers by the vehicle to which it is united) is in itself inca-

pable of waste or decay. Such is the simplicity of its essence that it cannot wear out, and such the dignity of its faculties that they may always preserve their vigour. The heavens will wax old as doth a garment — the elements will yield to the waste of time — and the earth and all her works shall be dissolved, but our souls will remain the same, and their years shall never fail. — But this is not the proper answer to the enquiries I have mentioned. It may be admitted, that even in a future state long use will have the same effect on our minds that it has now, and that the principle of curiosity will be always prompting us to seek new objects and scenes. This is a principle essential to an intellectual nature; and therefore the just and full reply to those enquiries is, that there is in the works and perfections of God and in infinite truth, an inexhaustible fund of employment for our faculties. If the curiosity of a reasonable soul is boundless, there is likewise a boundless variety of objects to gratify it, and consequently there will never be any room for that languor and weariness in an eternal existence which these enquiries suppose.

I should now go on to explain this, and also

to explain a circumstance connected with it of the utmost importance in our future existence: I mean the circumstance, that it is not only to be eternal, as explained in this discourse, but also eternally improving. A happiness that is to last through eternity is properly an infinite happiness. But a happiness that is not only to last, but to be continually increasing through eternity is an infinitely greater happiness. But this, together with the practical improvement of the whole, I shall beg leave to reserve for another discourse.

SERMON XVII.

ON THE ETERNAL, AND ETERNALLY-IMPROVING HAPPINESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN A FUTURE STATE.

1 JOHN ii. 25.

"*And this is the Promise that he hath promised, even Eternal Life.*"

WE are informed in these words, that God has by the Christian revelation given us the promise of an endless existence hereafter in happiness. In my last discourse I endeavoured to shew you the credibility of this promise by a variety of arguments taken from the perfections of God and the nature of the human soul. These arguments, joined to the express declarations of the Scriptures, appear to me of so much weight as to leave us but little reason for doubting on this sub-

ject. There are however some difficulties which will necessarily offer themselves to us when we consider seriously what eternity is. It is in particular natural to enquire, Must not an eternal existence some time or other become tiresome? After millions of ages have been spent, shall we not find employment wanting for our faculties, and the funds of happiness exhausted?

In answer to these enquiries, I observed at the close of my last discourse, that there are in the works and the perfections of God, and in infinite truth, inexhaustible sources of employment and happiness. I will now enlarge a little upon this, and then proceed, agreeable to the plan I have laid, to take notice of the particular circumstance in our future existence, that it is to be for ever improving.

Let us in the first place think of the extent of God's works. These are probably boundless; and all that our imaginations are capable of conceiving must fall unspeakably short of their real extent and magnificence. The scenes of beings and bliss in the distant worlds and systems with which the starry heavens are filled, are more grand and more vari-

ous than we have powers to comprehend. Beyond the starry heavens new plans of existence, and new exhibitions of almighty wisdom may take place, still more glorious and incomprehensible; nor may there be any limits to the gradations and varieties of order, and beauty, and excellence in the universe. Divine goodness, one would think, could not have been an eternity before it acted, and therefore the creation may have been existing from eternity; and as divine goodness can never be exhausted, the creation may go on existing to eternity. Such reflections have a tendency to carry our ideas of the universe very high; but we may be sure that it is not possible for us to carry them high enough. In studying the laws and constitution of this immense universe — in scanning its wonders — acquainting ourselves with its history, and in learning the scheme of eternal providence, we shall have enough to employ us for ever. Indeed any single district of the universe may be an object sufficient to employ our faculties, and to supply us with materials of happiness through indefinite ages. We at present see but little of the world, and of that little we are more ignorant than we can well imagine. Almost every thing within and every

thing without us is a mystery to us. Were it then even true, that in future duration we shall be confined to those parts of God's works which now lie nearest to us, we shall have ample scope for employment. But all that falls under our notice of God's works, and even all that our minds can feign to themselves is, I have said, inconsiderable compared with the whole of created existence, and therefore nothing can be more unreasonable than the apprehension that we can ever arrive at a future period in which there will be no more to be known or enjoyed.

We are brought forth into a world where we have room for expatiating without end. A volume is laid before us in the system of nature from which we may be for ever deriving instruction and entertainment. If our minds admit not of inactivity, but will be always requiring new objects, there will be always new objects for them, and new scenes to afford them exercise. But let us next turn our thoughts to abstract truth, and the perfections of the Deity. What I have just said will be much more evident when these are considered. These are in every view of them unfathomable, and present us with a prospect

of absolute infinity. In investigating eternal truth, and contemplating the nature of the Deity, and studying his incomprehensible essence, we shall be in a condition which I know not how to explain better than by comparing it to motion straight forwards in infinite space. Let such a motion be ever so rapid, it will (after numberless ages) leave the object that moves as far to move as at the instant when it set out: so likewise reasonable beings in the pursuit of knowledge, and wisdom, and virtue, will be as it were always starting. Infinity will always lie before them, and at the end of every possible future period of duration they will have as much to learn and to do as they had at the first moment of their existence. The apprehension therefore which I am considering is most evidently one of the vainest prejudices arising from the narrowest views. It deserves to be particularly attended to, that the boundless scope which I have said our souls have for new acquisitions is the same with boundless scope for new enjoyments. Every new region of the universe which we can visit — every new order of beings we can get acquainted with — every new connection into which we can enter, — every new view we can acquire of the divine nature, and

every new truth we can discover, will be new sources of enjoyment and happiness.

But this leads me to take notice of the particular circumstance in our future eternal existence, that it is to be an existence eternally improving. This follows naturally from what I have said. Every step in the progress I have described will be an improvement in knowledge and bliss. Such is the nature of an intelligent mind that it can never get to a point of perfection beyond which it is incapable of going. If it has room it will always improve; and it has been demonstrated that it has indeed infinite room. No subject can be more pleasing than this, and I will beg leave to insist particularly upon it in all that remains of this discourse.

The improveableness of our natures is one of their most distinguishing properties, and it is extremely agreeable to contemplate the gradual rise of human beings. At first they are helpless infants, without any appearance of rational and moral powers, and were a perfect stranger to the world to observe them in these circumstances, he could scarcely think it possible that they should grow up to be such crea-

tures as they afterwards become. From infancy they rise to childhood and youth, and all the while their faculties insensibly open, — their powers unfold themselves, — they acquire experience and habits, and learn many useful and necessary accomplishments. From childhood and youth they rise to manhood, where their rational and moral powers discover themselves in full vigour, and opportunities are given for constantly improving them till they are taken from hence, and rise to a higher and endless state of existence in another world. But it must not be imagined that their improvements will thus be at an end, or that, after exchanging this earth for heaven, a stop will be put to their acquisitions, and a period arrive when they will have no additions of knowledge or virtue or happiness to expect. The fact that the whole of what we see of our existence is progressive, affords a presumption that it will always continue to be progressive. But indeed I have shewn that it cannot be supposed to be otherwise without contradicting some of the strongest reasons.

No limits, I have observed, can be set to the possible improvements of intelligent

beings. The different modifications of which matter is susceptible, and the different forms under which it exists, are almost numberless. But spiritual essences must be capable of existing under an infinitely greater number of forms. Our immortal souls admit of an endless variety of ideas and sensations, which are now incomprehensible to us; they have many powers and faculties now dormant, which will hereafter shew themselves, and many sorts of pleasure and bliss now concealed, which will hereafter be opened. The principal causes of enjoyment and inlets of information which we have at present are our five senses. In another state there is no reason to doubt but that we shall acquire new senses; and it cannot be possible for us to imagine what an advancement in knowledge and dignity the opening of one new sense may occasion. A person born blind, upon having the faculty of sight given him, has a new world disclosed to him. Scenes and laws of nature before unknown discover themselves. Crowds of new ideas and sensations burst in upon him, and he finds himself at once raised higher in the scale of being. Like this, probably, will be the effects produced by every new sense which we may acquire hereafter, and the successive

opening of these new senses, and gradual evolution of our powers may furnish out business enough for eternity, and lay the foundation of an eternal progress in excellence and happiness.

But not to insist further on these observations, let me now desire you to think seriously of the truth I am endeavouring to explain, and of its consequences and importance. The works of creation and the capacities of our minds are (you have heard) boundless. The distance between the highest created being and the Deity is infinite. We have therefore (I have shewn you) infinite scope for improvement, and we are in fact to be for ever improving. There is nothing to stop our progress, nor is it possible that a time should come when our ascent in the scale of being shall rest, and our existence become absolutely stationary. There must be a future period when there will be a greater difference between what we are at present and what we shall be then, than there is between the meanest reptile and the highest archangel. This cannot appear extravagant to those who will duly reflect that by going on to improve, though ever so

slowly, through infinite ages, we must make higher acquisitions, and reach greater degrees of knowledge and dignity than any we can now assign or imagine. What I am now saying may be applied to all the various orders of virtuous beings in the universe. The whole reasonable creation is continually improving and brightening under the eye and care of their Almighty Parent. There are now existing undoubtedly numberless beings who are the productions of divine power. Though the time that has intervened since these received their existence should be allowed not to be infinite, it must at least be indefinite. There is an indefinite length of duration then in which they have been improving, and therefore must before now have attained to degrees of wisdom and perfection that are indefinite. How high then are they? How vast the distance between them and that nothing of yesterday, — poor feeble and ignorant man? This whole incomprehensible distance is filled up with numberless ranks of beings rising above one another beyond the utmost stretch of human conception. These all continually improving. Those who are now lowest, will in time get to the places of the highest, while these in the mean time

will be getting still higher. This representation cannot I think be wrong, and you will probably be better reconciled to it by reflecting that to whatever pitch of perfection reasonable beings by constant improvement may attain, they always must be, and after the further improvements of numberless ages to come, always will be, at an infinite distance from original perfection; and therefore equally dependent upon, and equally inferior to the self-existent Creator.

But to return to the consideration of our own state and hopes. We find ourselves at present in the lowest rank of reasonable creatures, but we are to ascend. This life is the infancy of our beings, and if what I have said is true, a time must come when we shall see angels below us. To be always growing wiser and greater, — to be rising and improving for ever. —What a prospect is this? How amazing, — how glorious? What shall we some time or other be? According to every notion of a future state, we are now as incapable of forming any notion of this as a child in the womb is of forming any notion of the employments and happiness of a grown man. But take in the consideration that we are

always to be improving, and it will appear that in no period of our existence shall we be able to conceive what we shall be in the periods beyond it, and that though always enjoying unspeakable happiness, we shall never know what happiness still greater we shall enjoy.

The following reflections on what I have said deserve your consideration.

1st. How incredible is it that beings who are capable of such a progress as I have described, and can extend their views through eternity in the manner I have represented, how incredible, I say, is it that such beings should be designed for no more than a short existence here, and after just shewing themselves, and being flattered with the idea of immortality, should sink into utter oblivion, and all perish in the first step of their progress?

2dly. We are naturally led on this occasion to acknowledge the wisdom of God. In consequence of making our existence progressive in the manner I have explained, one part of it is made a preparation for another,

and we are not brought to any more enlarged condition of being, before we have been qualified for it, and rendered capable of relishing its enjoyments and advantages. Thus, we are brought to manhood by being trained up to it in childhood and youth, and then learning those habits which are necessary to make us capable of being happy in it. And in like manner we are to be brought to the dignity of a future life, after passing through the discipline and trials of this life, and being formed by them to that virtuous temper and character which is the necessary foundation of all honour and bliss under the divine government. The like must be true of every successive dignity to which we shall rise through the ages of eternity. One sphere of action and enjoyment will be an introduction to that which next follows it, and every honor lay the foundation of still further honors. We are apt to be much too hasty and abrupt in our proceedings. The measures of the Deity have in them no such imperfection. He does not waste his gifts by bestowing them on beings before they are qualified for them. He does not confer full happiness immediately, or raise his creatures suddenly to any posts or stations to which

they are not properly fitted. On the contrary, we see that all in nature is progressive, and that the happiness and perfection of reasonable beings in particular are made with unspeakable wisdom to be the result of a gradual rise from low beginnings; or are the consequence of improvements added to improvements, and of honors built upon honors, without any end or limitation.

3dly. The present subject sets before us, in the strongest light, our own dignity. Were we beings of a day who are designed only for the scuffle of a few hours on this earthly stage, and then to sink and vanish, never more to be seen or heard of. — Were this the true account of our state, we could not think very highly of ourselves. A prospect so dreary and melancholy might well discourage us, and break within us all the springs of action and enjoyment. But our prospect is greatly different. We have before us a boundless existence, and it has appeared that our souls are of infinite value. Let us then reverence ourselves. Let us carry about with us every where a sense of our high hopes, and avoid all vice, as not only contrary to our duty and interest, but as unworthy of us, — as

a prostitution of our noble powers, and a stain on the dignity of our reasonable and immortal natures. A due attention to our own importance and worth would indeed render us incapable of doing any thing base or wrong, and communicate a constant elevation to our whole behaviour.

Again, let us on this subject consider what reason we have for adoring the goodness of God in blessing us with existence. Had we been designed only for existence in this life without the possibility of any future life, we should have had reason for gratitude. Had we been designed for existence in this life, and at the same time had the smallest sense been given us of a more happy existence after death, we should have had still more reason for gratitude. But to be blest with our present enjoyments, attended with the prospect of a happy existence hereafter, which will be always improving, — this is a benefit of inestimable value, and cold as death must our hearts be, if we can avoid being kindled by it into the most ardent gratitude and praise. Nothing can be so animating as the reflection that we have before us such a prospect. Nothing can be so glorious a proof of God's

goodness as his intending us for such an existence, and making us partakers of his own eternity.

Further; How much does it become us to be superior to this world, and to withdraw our affections from it? Our present existence, compared with our whole duration and unlimited hopes, is so inconsiderable as scarcely to deserve the name of existence; and it is of no consequence what befals us in it, if we are but ready for the state that is to follow it. None of the riches and pleasures and honors of life deserve a single wish from one who is convinced that he is to rise from death hereafter, and to live for ever. Nor (did we seriously consider this) would it be possible that all mortal things should not vanish from our sight. What nonsense are the contentions of children in the estimation of men, and how vain do their joys and sorrows appear to them. Just thus should we be affected towards all that passes here below, were we sufficiently attentive to the subject of this discourse. We should judge the noise and cares and pursuits of the children of this world to be all nonsense, and look down with a mixture of pity and disdain on the scramble

among mankind for places and power again. Through the course of endless ages, what senses of joy may we expect to feel? What new scenes may we expect to see? What glorious regions of the universe may we expect to visit? What attainments of knowledge and virtue may we expect to reach? Through what variety of untried beings may we expect to pass? What honors may we expect to be crowned with? Let us, fellow-christians, open our hearts to these views. Let them inspire us with fortitude and triumph. Let them loosen us from the earth, and give wings to our minds. Our present blessings are but the foretaste of nobler future blessings, and the present life no more than the dawn of a day that shall last for ever, and be for ever growing more and more bright and glorious. Oh transporting thought,—what a dignity of spirit becomes us? How little and insignificant are all temporal objects? What are those men who forget and disgrace this their high destination by sensuality and worldly wickedness, who look to annihilation as their refuge; and though made to soar with angels, and to live through eternity, yet chuse to grovel in the dirt, and to revel in the midst of it? It

is impossible to express the abject condition of such persons. They are unworthy of the rank they hold in the world, betrayers of the interests of humanity, and traitors to the species.

But I am led from hence to desire you in the last place to think how dreadful it will be to come short of the happiness I have been describing. I scarcely need tell you that there is danger of this, — God's goodness in giving us ourselves is unspeakable; but it is a gift which may be lost. Our Lord has very plainly intimated this to us in Luke ix. 28. "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose himself, or be cast away?" All are not to enjoy a happy immortality. It is reserved only for the virtuous, the pious, and worthy. I took particular notice of this in my former discourse. The righteous and the wicked are to rise from death hereafter through the power of Christ. But the language of Scripture is, that the one are to rise to die a second time; and the other to die no more. Our Lord tells us, that "all that are in their graves shall hereafter hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to

the resurrection of damnation." This is the awful distinction that according to the scripture account is to be made between them. Both possessed of the same noble powers and capacities; but like a plant crushed in the seed the wicked are to be lost and undone. Nothing can well set the evil of sin in a stronger light than this. What ruins an immortal nature, — What blasts an existence that would otherwise have been eternally improving, and thus deprives it of infinite happiness, may indeed with the strictest propriety be said to be an infinite evil. Let us with the utmost earnestness avoid this evil. Had we a proper sense of our own interest in this instance, it would never be possible for us to consent to any wrong action. The bare possibility of such danger attending wickedness would be sufficient to guard us against it. Every temptation would lose its force, and every irregular pleasure its allurement. All our thoughts, cares, and wishes would be swallowed up in the one great concern about saving our souls and providing for another world. To purchase a few transient gratifications at the risque of losing ourselves. To yield to a vile passion at the hazard of being lost for ever. To give up, for the tinsel of

time, ever increasing dignity and happiness. —May heaven preserve you and me from a folly so frightful!

We are apt to be too much impressed by present events, and too much taken up with our worldly concerns. Eternity has but little of that influence on the best of us which it ought to have. Let us by close and frequent reflection on its nature and weight, endeavour to bring ourselves more under its influence. Let us think continually that we have but little time to continue here, and that our everlasting life or death are depending on what we now do. Let us sacrifice every thing to a good conscience, having our conversation always in heaven, and shewing to all about us minds full of the best affections, elevated above this world, and warmed with an ambition becoming the views of the heirs of eternity.

But it is high time to conclude. May God enable us to enter properly into the sense and weight of the declaration in my text,—"This is the promise which he has promised through Christ, even eternal life."

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE DUTY OF GIVING GLORY TO GOD.

1 Cor. x. 31.

Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.

THE words that precede and follow these contain an exhortation to the Corinthians, to avoid giving offence to such of their fellow-christians as scrupled eating meat that had been offered to idols. These Christians were probably some Jewish converts who had been trained up in such a horror at idolatry as to think it a crime ever to taste any kind of meat that had entered a temple, or been used for the purposes of idolatry.

The advice which St. Paul gives on this occasion to such of the Gentile converts as

felt no scruples of this kind seems very just and proper. He intimates, that however innocent in itself such a conduct was, yet it became criminal whenever it was the means of hurting any weak minds, by shocking their prejudices too much. "*All things*, says he, *are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful to me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every one another's good. Whatever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no questions for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice to idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake. Conscience, I say, not thine own, but thy brother's. Give none offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God. And whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God:*" that is, act always in a manner that shall be most likely to give glory to God, by shewing a tender regard to the scruples of your Christian brethren, and avoiding every practice that has a tendency to mislead them and to prejudice the interest of religious virtue.

My present design is to take occasion from these words to explain the duty of giving

glory to God, and to endeavour to enforce it by representing the reasons for it, and the obligations to it.

Let us 1st, consider what in this case we ought to mean by the glory of God. This is a phrase that has been sadly misunderstood and misapplied. Some good men have considered it as meaning chiefly that absolute sovereignty of the Deity by which he is supreme over the universe, and does whatever he pleases with his creatures. There is a system of faith which asserts that the end of our creation was to glorify God, and at the same time teaches us that he has fore-ordained whatever comes to pass, electing a few of mankind to everlasting happiness, while the greatest part are abandoned to unavoidable and eternal misery. This creed adds, that God does this from his own good pleasure, and for the advancement of his own glory. In conformity with such representations it has been too common among Christians to think that the glory of God requires them to persecute their brethren, to burn heretics, to consign to damnation those who receive not their code of faith, and even to question whether they ought not to consent to suffer damnation

themselves, should this be supposed to be conducive to God's glory. Under a conviction of the pernicious tendency of such sentiments, and as a preservative from them, let us now set ourselves to consider what is properly signified by God's glory, and what are the proper means by which it is to be promoted.

You should here recollect, that there is a twofold glory of the Deity, — one inherent in him and essential to him, — and the other relative, or dependent on the state of his creation and the conduct of his creatures. The former signifies that absolute perfection of nature by which God is in himself necessarily and eternally all that is great, wise, and good. His glory in this sense of it cannot possibly either be increased or diminished. The duty therefore of giving glory to him cannot imply that we are capable of making the least addition to his glory thus understood. To imagine this, or to suppose that his innate glory and dignity, as possessed of every possible perfection, are capable of being affected by any thing that any being can do, would be an absurdity and blasphemy of the wildest sort. This however cannot be said of his glory in the

other sense of it. His relative glory (that is, his glory as the governor and lawgiver of intelligent beings) is capable of being affected by their conduct. It is easy to see that this is true. The glory of a king, considered not in himself, but in his relation to his subjects, consists in the order and happiness which prevail among them, — in their respect for his character, their attachment to his authority, and obedience to the laws by which he governs them. As far as his subjects think meanly of him; as far as they are rebellious or disaffected, and anarchy and misery prevail among them, so far he is dishonoured, and his government wants its proper glory. This is justly applicable to the relation in which the Deity stands to the world. He does not govern reasonable beings by any wicked laws or compulsory methods. This would make their obedience of no value, and take away from the creation all kinds of moral merit and dignity. Their obedience must be left to be a free-will offering; this being the only service that can be acceptable to him, or do him any real honour. When therefore this is withdrawn, and his reasonable creatures break his laws, and introduce disorder and misery into the world, they dishonour him, by striking at

the majesty of his government, and defacing his works. In short, it is then we give to God the glory due to him, when we pay him the homage which his perfections demand, when our souls are possessed with the deepest reverence for him, when we love him above all things, and submit chearfully to his authority, — when we do his will, and answer the purpose for which he has created us, — when we are his pious, grateful, and lowly subjects, and do all we can to enlighten and reform mankind, and to promote the order, and harmony, and felicity of the world. Such is the general account of this duty. But it may be proper to repeat some of those heads, and to give a more distinct recital of the several particulars in which the duty of glorifying God consists.

1st. In order to glorify God, it is necessary that we should entertain worthy and honorable apprehensions of him. Those who think of him as such a one as themselves, who ascribe to him human passions and weaknesses, and represent him as arbitrary, partial, and malevolent, offer him the worst injury. They vilify his character, and fall miserably short of the duty they owe him. Nothing is

of more importance than that we should remove from our ideas of him every thing that is low and gross, or that implies any kind of imperfection. We should learn to consider Him as a being in whom is met, as in its source and centre, whatever can be the object of veneration, affection, and esteem. At the same time that we stand in awe of Him as the greatest, we should look to Him as the best and most amiable of all beings.

2dly. These sentiments should be expressed by suitable acts, and particularly by the discharge of all the duties of private worship. He who never directs his thoughts to Him in the way of praise and adoration, neglects a most important obligation, and practically denies his existence. Our inward reverence for Him should discover itself by an uniform course of unaffected and ardent devotion. As we should never think of Him without humble and deep veneration, so we should never speak of Him, much less should we ever pray to Him without a guard on our attention, and an awe upon our minds. How inconsistent then with the duty I am explaining is the common custom of using His name lightly on every trifling occasion?

This, in the manner it is sometimes done, is indeed a horrible practice. For what can be more so, than to invoke Him in order to gain credit to falsehood, or to use his name in order to give a stronger vent to our passions in profane oaths and curses? How licentious and impious must the men be who can be capable of this? It has been told of a great philosopher*, that he had his mind so impressed by a sense of the awful greatness of the Deity, that he never mentioned His name without a pause in his discourse. This had in it perhaps too much of the appearance of affectation. But a reverent caution in thinking or speaking of the Deity, preventing all the loose talk and profane exclamations which we are often hearing, will be found in every person who attends properly to the sacredness of his nature and character.

Again, we glorify God when we pay a just regard to all his institutions. I have here in view the observation of the Lord's day, and the positive duties of Christianity. To honor God, we should remember, is to honor his will and ordinances. But above all things avoiding sin, and the practice of virtue are a

* Boyle.

necessary means of honoring God. *Herein*, says our Saviour, *is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.* The Philippians, St. Paul tells us, *were filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ unto the praise and glory of God*, (Philip. i. 11.)

Sin is the subversion of order in his creation, and therefore is the enemy that robs him of his glory, and if we would promote it, we must give no countenance to this enemy. We must flee from every appearance of evil, and conform ourselves to those laws of everlasting righteousness and truth, on which depend the harmony and happiness of the universe. This is the way to shew ourselves his dutiful subjects, and most truly and acceptably to do him honor.

It is proper to add, that we must endeavour to lead others to glorify him. It is needless to tell you how much this is in our power. God has unspeakably distinguished us by making us capable of this, and of concurring with him in carrying on his ends, and in strengthening the interest of virtue among our fellow-creatures. He has made us capable of this in various ways, and more especially by

our examples and instructions. By exhibiting an example of manly piety, strict justice, universal benevolence, unfeigned humility, and inflexible integrity, we may display the excellence of religious virtue, and win mankind to the admiration of it. Such examples when united to suitable admonitions and zealous exertions in doing all possible good must be irresistible in their operation, and diffuse a lustre around us that will enlighten and animate all within our influence. Recollect here our Lord's injunction to his followers, *that they would make their light so to shine before men, that others seeing their good works might be led to glorify their heavenly Father*, (Mathew, v. 16.) The best season for glorifying God in this way is in a time of general corruption and degeneracy. Then, when vice and profaneness triumph, and the paths of virtue are forsaken, to stand up for the interest of truth and virtue, — to bear our testimony against prevailing iniquity, and to resolve to suffer, or even to die, rather than yield to difficulties in a virtuous course, and desert our duty. — Such conduct, I say, in such circumstances, is the noblest which human nature is capable of, and the most honorable to God. Thus died Socrates in

the heathen world. Thus acted the apostles and martyrs under Christianity, and many good men in modern ages, who have immortalized their names, and by their instructions and exertions brought on the present enlightened times. But above all, thus acted our Lord Jesus Christ, a name that is above every name, the best of all teachers, who by sacrificing himself on the Cross, did more than any other messenger from heaven to glorify God.

Another instance mentioned in the Scriptures of giving glory to God is the exercise of gratitude to him. *Whoso offereth praise*, the Psalmist says, *glorifies God.* (Psalm l. 23.) When of the ten lepers who were cleansed by our Saviour, only one (and he a Samaritan) returned to thank him, his language was *that they had all, save that stranger, neglected to give glory to God*, (Luke xvii. 18.)

That vanity and self-sufficiency which produce ingratitude are inconsistent with the conviction which ought always to possess us, that it is God that makes us to differ, and that it is to his bounty we owe all we are, and all we enjoy. It was for this wretched vanity that Herod was punished in the manner re-

lated in the book of Acts (xii. 23.) On a set day he mounted his throne, and arrayed in royal apparel, made an oration to the people, who on hearing him, gave a shout and cried *It is the voice of a God, and not of man.* Immediately after this shout, the history tells us, that he was smitten by an angel, (that is by an invisible messenger of divine vengeance,) so that he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost *because he gave not God the glory.* This is a most striking fact, and it is remarkably confirmed by the Jewish historian Josephus, who tells us, that the distemper with which Herod was struck, (while thus blasphemously applauded) was a distemper attended with *racking pains in his bowels,* of which he soon expired in violent agonies.

Further; confidence in the Deity, and a reliance on his promises, and faithfulness are mentioned in the Scriptures as instances of glorifying God. Thus we read in Rom. iv.20, that "Abraham staggered not at the promise of God, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Honoring Christ also is mentioned in the same manner. So the apostle tells the Philippians, "that God hath highly exalted Christ, and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that he is Lord to *the glory of God the Father.*" (Phil. ii. 20.) We must therefore remember that all the honor we pay to Christ, ought to be given as an instance of the glory we ought to give to that Supreme Being who is the fountain of all jurisdiction in the universe, and no less Christ's God and Father than he is our God and Father.

To say no more on this head. We glorify God when, in all the gratitude we owe to inferior beings, and all the obedience we owe to their authority, we carry our views ultimately to Him, compared with whom there is no being great or good: when we commit ourselves to his care, and rely implicitly on his benignity: — when we are sensible of our dignity as the children of his family, and the subjects of his moral government, and avoid every thing that has a tendency to stain this dignity, and to dishonour these relations: when we make the light of our good works so to shine before men, as to induce them to imitate us: when we study to promote peace on earth, and good-will among our

fellow-creatures, — to serve the interest of true religion, — to make all about us charitable and virtuous, and thus to add to the happiness of God's creation, and increase the beauty of his works. Such is the duty which I am explaining: let us now in the next place attend to some of the motives to it.

1st. Let us consider the sublimity of the end at which it requires us to aim. The glory of God as it has now been explained, is the highest of all ends. It is the end at which the ambition of superior beings is directed, and which even God himself pursues. A regard to his own glory in the maintenance of truth and right, — in doing what is wisest and best, and in producing the happiness and promoting the order of his works, is the principle which governs his universal administration. Is it possible that we should not be anxious about directing our ambition to an end so excellent, or can we set ourselves in opposition to it, make ourselves hindrances to the harmony of nature, and chuse (as far as we can) to bring dishonour upon its parent and governor?

2dly. Another motive to this duty may be

taken from the consideration of the obligations we are under to the Deity, and of the right he has to our best services, as the author and the owner of our beings. This is St. Paul's argument in a passage parallel to that from which I have taken my text. *Ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits which are his.* We are his by creation. He endued us with those powers by which we are capable of glorifying him. "We are his by redemption. He has bought us (as St. Peter says) with no less a price than that of the precious blood of Christ, who was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but manifested in these last times for us, who by him believe in God who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory." We are his also by the in-dwelling of his grace and spirit. Christians are for this reason styled by St. Paul *the temple of God.* This title was peculiarly applicable to the first Christians on account of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit with which they were endued.

But we have no reason to think that it may not in a lower sense be justly applied to sincere Christians and good men in all ages.

Know ye not (says St. Paul) *that you are the temples of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.* (1 Cor. iii. 16, &c.) We cannot view ourselves in a more important and honourable light than this, or as temples of the ever-blessed God, where all should be pure and sacred, where the incense of praise and adoration should be continually rising, and into which nothing should be admitted that is not worthy of the in-dwelling Divinity.

He is entitled, I have just said, to our best services. But how are we to serve him? The whole combined world can make no addition to his innate dignity. There is however a way in which we can serve him. I have, in this discourse, been pointing out this way to you. He has a cause in the world. This cause is the cause of liberty and justice, — the cause of peace and virtue, and by serving this cause we serve *Him.* His glory, (I have observed), as the ruler of free agents, consists in their veneration and love, — their contentment under His government, — their imitation of Him, and obedience to His laws.

This glory of his He has made to depend on our exertions, and thus given us the power of doing Him honor, and of serving Him by serving and benefiting our fellow-creatures.

Again let me here recall to your remembrance the illustrious example which I have before-mentioned to you. Jesus Christ, the founder of our religion, has been the means of contributing in the highest degree to the glory of God. A zeal for this was the principle which actuated him in his humiliation and sufferings. So ardent was he in pursuing this end, that he could at the close of his ministry appeal to his Father, and say, *I have glorified thee on earth. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.* (John xvii. 4.) Shall we not be ambitious to copy so bright a pattern? It is indeed but little we can do, compared with what He did; for He performed a service under God's government, to which we can conceive no parallel, and myriads of happy men will hereafter unite in celebrating his praises. But though the services of which we are capable cannot

bear a comparison with His, yet the same mind may be in us that was in Him; and for our encouragement we should consider that if we labour as He laboured, and do all we can (however little that may be) to promote virtue and happiness, we shall be made partakers of His reward.

But this leads me to direct you, in the last place, to recollect that those who glorify God by the conduct I have described, He will glorify. They are the choicest parts of His creation, and He will distinguish them as His favourites. No instance of their dutiful allegiance to His government, and zeal for His service will fail of a recompence. Every accession of glory to Him will be an accession of glory to themselves. Those virtuous men (now perhaps abused and ridiculed) who contribute in the smallest degree to enlighten mankind, and to make the world happier, will, at the future period of universal retribution, have their names confessed and honoured, and they will be taken to those habitations of the just where they shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. Have you any ambition to obtain this happiness? Then comply with the precept in my text, and

whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, study to do all to the glory of God. Having now explained this duty, and proposed the motives to it, let us, before we drop our attention to it, take occasion to represent to ourselves the grandeur of the creation. How delightful is the reflection on an immense universe, the production of infinite power, and the seal of order and bliss, in which numberless ranks of beings are always rejoicing in the munificence of their Maker, and shewing forth His glory, which from a past eternity has been brightening and improving, and will continue to do so through a future eternity!

The state of the creation is without doubt glorious beyond all that we can conceive. But it is made so particularly, by the voluntary agency of the beings with which it is replenished. The most transporting of all the privileges of our natures is our capacity of making this an object of our exertions. Let us labour to act suitable to so high a distinction in making the world happier, and in promoting its order and beauty. We know this to be in our power. We see the state of the inhabitants of this earth to be such as

gives us opportunities for it. Among mankind there is much evil. God's laws are broken. His goodness is abused, and his authority is insulted. This is a state of things which, as far as it takes place, diminishes the order and beauty of the creation, and most probably it has been permitted by the creator on purpose to afford us room for displaying our zeal and His glory. Let our hearts burn with this zeal, but at the same time let us take care to inform ourselves well with respect to the proper manner of expressing it, that we may avoid a zeal which defeats it own end; a blind zeal which delights in mischief, and under the pretence of promoting God's glory, disparages and vilifies it. Our Saviour has alluded to a zeal of this kind, by saying that the "time was coming when they who killed his disciples would think they did God service." There have been in all ages multitudes of such ignorant and wretched zealots. There are multitudes now who, like the persecutors our Lord had in view, think of doing God service by laying restraints on free enquiry, by destroying schismaticks, and silencing and crushing all who cannot believe and worship as they do. Let us avoid this pernicious mistake, and never

think of any such absurdity as doing God service by hurting his creatures. On the contrary, let us study to glorify Him by promoting peace on earth, and good-will among men; particularly by endeavouring to propagate a conviction of the following truth, — a truth which I have often repeated, but cannot repeat too often, and which, could a due conviction of it be worked into every mind, would make an end of uncharitableness, and cause all mankind to respect one another amidst all their religious differences: I mean the truth, "that nothing is essential but an honest heart, nothing important but a sincere desire to know and to practise the will of God."

Happy are those who, possessing affluence and power, esteem them no further valuable than as they are the means of enabling them thus to glorify God. Happy more especially are those whose office being to teach others, are faithful and diligent in their endeavours to instil into the minds of men principles of candour and benevolence, — to spread the knowledge and fear of God, and to enlarge His kingdom of righteousness in the world. Happy are all who, in their several situations,

and according to their several abilities endeavour to cause the name of God to be hallowed, and his will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. God loves them, and that holy state will soon receive them, where, in the possession of complete happiness, they shall be for ever seeing and displaying his glory.

SERMON XIX.

ON THE DUTY OF IMITATING GOD.

MATTHEW v. 48.

"*Be ye therefore perfect as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect.*"

OUR Saviour in the words preceding these exhorts his followers to cultivate love to all men, not even excepting their enemies and persecutors. "*You have heard that it has been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you:* (v. 43.) The Jews (it should be recollected) were a body of the most narrow and vindictive men that ever existed. They had no idea of their

obligation to universal benevolence and candour. Our Saviour here, in opposition to this dreadful error, exhorts his disciples not to suffer their benevolence to be restrained by any of the distinctions that take place among mankind, not even by that between friends and enemies, and good and bad men. In order to engage them to this, he sets before them the character of the ever-blessed Deity, of that self-existent parent and governor of nature who is good to all. "*Love your enemies. Do good to them who hate you, that you may be the children of your heavenly Father, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you embrace your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the publicans so?*

This is a very striking passage. The concluding words of it are those of my text. "*Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.*"

The word *perfect* here does not signify absolute perfection, but such a degree of good-

ness as, in the particular instance of benevolence, is necessary to complete a character, by making it entirely virtuous and worthy. The meaning therefore of this admonition may be thus expressed. "Pray for all men. Do good to all men. Love all men; for there is nothing meritorious in loving those who love you, or in embracing persons of the same sect, or religion, or nation with yourselves. This even the worst of men do. But do you aim at higher goodness, and strive to imitate the Deity, and to be in this instance, as far as you can, perfect as he is perfect."

My present design is to take occasion from these words to discourse to you on the duty of imitating God. In doing this, the best method I can take is, 1st, to explain the duty; and 2dly, to enforce it by setting before you the motives to it. Let us 1st, consider what it is to imitate God. It is plain that in some respects no created beings are capable of resembling Him. This is true of his self-existence, of the infinity of his attributes, and of that necessity by which he possesses an absolute perfection of nature and character. His attributes are divided into two sorts; his natural attributes, or those which He possesses by

a natural necessity; such as his independence, his omnipresence, and omniscience. And his moral attributes are those which depend on the rectitude of his will; such as his justice, faithfulness, and goodness. It is the latter only of these attributes that we are capable of imitating; that is, it is only in the exercise of his power and the direction of his will that we can be like him. And how is his will directed? What are the ends which employ his power, and the rules by which he is determined in all his operations? Answer these questions to yourselves, and you will see what it is to imitate Him. His will is always directed to truth and reason. The end which employs his power is the happiness of the creation. The rules by which he acts are the eternal rules of equity, justice, and goodness. We imitate Him then, when our wills are likewise directed by truth and reason, when the happiness of the world is the end which employs our power, and our actions are determined by equity and goodness. Such is the general and brief account of this duty; but it will be proper to be a little more distinct.

1st. We imitate the Deity (I have said,)

when, like his, our wills are directed by truth and righteousness. This is in reality the whole of this duty, for all the particular virtues in which it consists are included in the conformity of our wills to the obligations of righteousness. It is this that in the properest and strictest sense makes us holy as God is holy, and perfect as He is perfect. We must indeed in this respect fall infinitely short. His perfect nature is such as does not admit of the possibility of any error in his judgment of what is right, or of a temptation to deviate from it. He perceives the whole law of truth in all its appearances and excellence. He has no biasses in Him that are inconsistent with it; and therefore every measure of his government, every counsel of his providence, and every display of his omnipotence is conformable to it. In other words (and to speak less improperly on a subject which does not admit of language entirely proper) he is himself this eternal law. Truth and right are implied in his necessary intelligence. They are his nature, and therefore the conformity of his actions to them is much the same with his being himself. Nothing like this is true of us. We are liable to be deceived by wrong views of what is right, and to be mis-

led by numberless temptations. But though a perfection of will of the same kind with his be unattainable by us, yet the principle that guides our wills may be the same; and as far as this principle is a regard to truth and right, it is the same; and the more fixed and efficacious this regard is, the more we know of truth and right, and see of their importance and feel of their influence, so much the more our minds have of a common principle with the Deity, and participate of that moral excellence which is his glory.

2dly, I must observe particularly that we imitate God, when we cherish in our minds an ardent and extensive benevolence, and strive to do all the good in our power. I have already observed that this is what our Lord had immediately in view when He delivered the precept in my text. It is to this that rectitude principally carries us; and goodness is the most important and amiable of all the moral perfections of the Deity. It is to this that the universe owes its existence, and that all beings owe their preservation and support. From hence is derived whatever there is of order and beauty and happiness in the creation. The tender mercies of God

are over all his works. He openeth his hand and satisfieth the desires of every living creature. From eternal ages He has been distributing, through numberless worlds, the effects of his benevolence, and in this distribution will his almighty power be employed through an eternity of future ages. We find ourselves among the objects of it. He has made us on purpose to feel his love, to be witnesses of his inexhaustible bounty, and under its influence and care to improve and rise for ever. This is a goodness immense, perfect, and unspeakable. Let us remember that we are capable in some measure of resembling it, — by studying to add to the happiness of all about us, — by cultivating in ourselves a charitable temper, and being ready to assist our fellow-creatures as far as our ability reaches; and when our ability does not reach, by giving scope to our kind wishes, and grasping within our benevolent affections the whole world, and rejoicing in every degree of felicity we see, and particularly in that everlasting and all-governing Providence, which is the source, the foundation, and the security of universal happiness. In this way and by these means we have it in our power to be imitators of God, and to co-operate with

Him. There is in truth no brighter image of the Deity here below than a man possessed of weight and power who acts thus, — who employs his power to increase that happiness which is the end of God's administration, — to protect merit, — relieve misery, and to spread through the earth, as far as he can, peace, candour, knowledge, and liberty. Such persons are little deities among mankind. We see displayed in their conduct and character the excellence and glory of the Supreme Deity.

Another attribute of God proper to be mentioned is his placability. To this St. Paul has referred in his epistle to the Ephesians, (chap. v. 1.) *Be ye kind to one another, and forgive one another, as God through Christ has forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.* The pacific character of the Deity has been exhibited to us in the gospel in the strongest light. He is there represented as publishing an act of grace to sinful men, and sending His only begotten Son into the world to assure them of favour upon their repentance, and to restore them to glory and immortality. Our Lord has told us repeatedly that our own acceptance by the

Deity depends on our imitation of Him in this instance. His language to us is, *Forgive one another, that your heavenly Father may also forgive you; for if ye forgive not, neither shall ye be forgiven.* In the parable of the unmerciful servant, at the same time that God is represented as ready to pardon our greatest offences, He is described as punishing those who do not imitate Him in this, with a severity like to that with which the unmerciful servant was punished, who, though his master had forgiven him ten thousand talents, would not forgive his fellow-servant a hundred pence. Forbearance, therefore, gentleness, and placability, are necessary expressions of our imitation of the Deity.

I might go on to mention many other particular virtues, but there is no occasion for this. They are all included in that general principle which I have mentioned, and the sum of all is, that the image of God in men shews itself in their maintaining an invariable regard to truth and right, in their aversion to moral turpitude and love of all virtue, in the holiness of their lives and tempers, in their benevolence, usefulness, mercifulness, faithfulness, purity, and integrity.

Let us next consider the motives which induce us to endeavour to resemble the Deity in the manner I have described. These motives are the strongest that can be conceived; for in the imitation of God consist our duty, our dignity, and our happiness. Let us first think how much it is our duty. We shall be sensible of this when we have considered how strongly we are led to it by the reasons of things, by the relations in which we stand to the Deity, and by the obedience and gratitude we owe to Him.

Is there any thing so reasonable as that the same moral distinctions which are a rule to the Deity, should be a rule likewise to us? Is there any thing so fit as that the equity and benignity which determine his choice, should also determine our choice? Does it not imply a shocking perverseness of character to counteract and oppose the Sovereign of Nature, by refusing to have that law for our guide which is His guide? Does he employ his infinite power in producing universal happiness, and shall we employ our scanty power in defeating his intentions? Does his benevolence embrace and exhilarate the whole world, and extend even to the evil and un-

thankful, and shall our benevolence be confined to the little circle of a few favourites and friends, or persons of the same country with us? Is he placable, merciful and faithful, and shall we be revengeful, cruel, and faithless? Shall not children imitate what they see excellent in their parents, and does not every parent require this from his children? We are the children of God, and as such we are bound to direct our attention to Him in our conduct, and to assimilate ourselves to Him as far as possible. We have derived our existence from Him. We are indebted to Him for all our past blessings, for every present enjoyment, and for the most transporting future hopes, and as far as we possess any sense of gratitude or feeling of ingenuity, we must be anxious about doing Him all the honor, and making all the returns we can; and the highest honor we can do, is to endeavour to act as He acts. The best return we can make Him is, by forgiving others as He forgives us, and being good to others as He is good to us. His enduing us with powers, by which we discern moral obligations, plainly signifies to us the impossibility of pleasing Him without conforming to those obligations; for certainly He would

not have given us the knowledge of them if He had not intended they should guide us as they guide Him. He must approve and commend that righteousness which He himself practises. It must be His will that His children should manifest their affection and veneration by making His character the model of their own. It is thus only they can shew themselves His dutiful children, and give the glory due to His name.

I have before mentioned, that in speaking on this subject there is a necessity of using language concerning the Deity which is not strictly just. The idea of moral obligation is by no means applicable to Him in the same sense and manner that it is applicable to inferior beings, nor can it with propriety be said of the Self-existent Being that the eternal laws of righteousness are laws to Him as they are to inferior beings; these implying something eternal and necessary, by which He is governed, and which at the same time is distinct from, and independent of Him. Such language, however, though wrong when understood literally and strictly, is right in the general sentiment which it is intended to express, and any misconception to which it

may lead us will be guarded against, if we take care to remember that the laws of truth and righteousness (by which it is folly to say that God is directed) are in reality, as I have already observed, *himself*, and that our discernment of them is nothing but a partial conception of His nature. In this view of them they acquire an importance and awfulness greater than any they have in any other manner of considering them, and the sense of obligation attending the perception of them becomes an immediate and explicit declaration, that it is the will of the Deity that they should be obeyed; for it appears that it is God himself immediately that speaks to us, and that, in short, the obligations of righteousness and benevolence are attributes of the Deity forming one idea, which is power, and constituting that unchangeable rectitude and perfection of His will which is the object of our imitation. They are his laws written upon every heart, and binding equally every reasonable creature, and whenever we contradict them in our actions, we alienate ourselves from Him, and create an opposition between our natures and his nature.

But 2dly, as the imitation of God is thus

our duty, so is it likewise our dignity. He is the standard of all that is perfect, and by the degree of approach to this standard is determined the excellence and dignity of all beings. Our bodily senses and appetites we possess in common with the brutes. What gives us our pre-eminence and most truly elevates us, is our knowledge of the Being that made us, and our capacity of imitating Him. If then we value our highest privilege; If we have a just sense of our own honor, or any feelings of that sacred ambition which becomes us as the intellectual offspring of the Deity, we should aim at resembling Him, and thus ennobling humanity, and rising to divine excellence, by making ourselves partakers of a divine nature.

How contemptible must that man be, who can be indifferent to such a motive as this? Who can think of his being capable of a likeness to God without a holy ardor, and prefer his own debasement by vice and sensuality, to his own exaltation, I should rather say, his own deification by virtue and benevolence?

From hence it follows, 3dly, that in the imitation of God consists our happiness.—

Duty, dignity, and happiness are essentially connected. Godlike qualities and virtues must produce godlike bliss. The character of the Deity is infinitely amiable. Our supreme excellence consists (as I have just observed) in our conformity to it; and every step by which we can gain any degree of this conformity, is a step towards complete felicity. It is impossible that God should not delight in his own image wherever it exists; and what He delights in must be blest with the effects of his particular care and protection. How lovely an object is a mind that bears this image? What order, what harmony, what a heavenly satisfaction must possess it? With what confidence may it contemplate its parent and preserver? What a friend has it in the Sovereign of the creation? There is no happiness except in God, and through Him; and none can be happy in Him but those who are like Him. There is an essential repugnancy between His nature and all moral evil. It is just as possible that light and darkness should be the same, as that He should be the cause of bliss to vicious men. The future reward is to consist in seeing and knowing God. This has been called the beatifick vision; and since God is

a being of spotless purity, it is self-evident that nothing can qualify for such a vision, except a correspondent purity of nature and character.

I shall conclude with the following reflections. 1st. How sure are the foundations of religion laid, and how strong is the evidence for it. By religion is properly meant the practice of virtue from a regard to the will and authority of the Deity; and the subject of this discourse shews that the obligation to this is just as certain, evident, and unchangeable, as his moral perfections. The proof of it is included in the following short reasoning. There is an eternal moral difference between actions and ends. God sees this difference, or rather his nature constitutes it. He is therefore himself perfectly righteous and good; and being so, he must require his intelligent creatures to be so as far as he has given them powers for being so, and consequently he must approve and favor them, or on the contrary disapprove and punish them as they are, or are not so.

2dly. The subject of this discourse shews us in what true religion consists. It is plain

that it consists entirely in being like God, or as St. Paul speaks, in being "imitators of Him as dear children." This is what alone can render Him favorable to any of his creatures. Without this, all the external homage we can pay Him, all our prayers, or professions, or sacrifices, and attendance on ordinances only make us more the objects of his displeasure.

We see in the world a vast variety of different religions. They are almost all of them only so many systems of ceremony, and different modes of superstition, placing religion in a sordid will-worship, — in bodily services, repeating creeds and outward forms. True religion is a totally different thing. It consists in mercy more than sacrifice, — in doing more than believing, — in fidelity and justice more than any ritual services. Such in particular is the true Christian religion. It makes loving God with all our hearts, and loving our neighbour as ourselves, to be more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices. It makes a faith that could remove mountains, to be of no consequence without that charity which seeketh not her own, which hopeth all things, and endureth all things. It calls men

off from superstition and idolatry, to the acknowledgment and the imitation of that one Supreme Being whose tender mercies are over all his works; and its exhortation to its professors is, *Be holy as God is holy. Be merciful as He is merciful.*

3dly. We may learn from what has been said, how important it is that we form just notions of God. It must be expected that the actions and characters of men will be governed in a great degree by the ideas they have of the object of their worship. If they represent Him to themselves as a partial, a vindictive, a capricious, or a cruel being, they will be reconciled to those vices, and their characters will take a suitable turn; and it is not to be doubted but that the low and unworthy notions which the ancient heathens entertained of their deities, contributed much to the corruption of their characters.

It is one of the irresistible recommendations of Christianity, that it removes this cause of corruption, and that while it commands us to imitate God, it describes Him to us as the best of Beings,—as the Father of mercies, as goodness itself, as the friend of

all virtue, the enemy of all vice, and the perfect pattern of all that is amiable and excellent.

Happy are those who, despising all other ambition, place their ambition in being and doing like God. This is the labour of angels, be it then ours. To this all the myriads of superior beings aspire. This is the measure of their dignity, the limit of their views and wishes. Let us unite our ambition to theirs, that hereafter we may rise to their honors, and be admitted to their number. We have room for endless improvement without the possibility of ever reaching a point, beyond which we shall not be able to make further improvements; for the distance between God and his creatures is infinite, and must remain so after all possible future additions to their dignity and bliss.

I have now been explaining to you the first of all duties. I have been proposing the sublimest of all ends, and exhorting you to engage in the noblest of all works. It is indeed an arduous as well as a glorious work. But we have no reason for despondence. If

we apply our zeal to it, God will assist us. His grace and favour are never wanting to those who are not wanting to themselves. Being therefore sure of the co-operation of God's grace, let us study to acquire a likeness to Him, that thus we may be his genuine offspring, and fit ourselves for seeing Him and being happy in Him for ever. Let us think of the order that governs nature. Let us exhibit that order in our own conduct that we may share in the infinite happiness which it has been established to produce. Let us consider that the noblest spectacle we can present to the surrounding creation, is a heart reflecting the likeness of the Deity, a mind formed by his benevolence and rectitude. Let us remember that this is glory unspeakable and eternal, and that no feigned sanctity of manners, or punctuality in rites and ceremonies will, without this, be of any use to us, or make any amends for the want of a virtuous temper and character.

SERMON XX.

ON THE FUTURE INHERITANCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

REV. xxi. 7.

"*He that overcometh shall inherit all things.*"

ST. JOHN in this chapter represents himself as seeing in prophetic vision the present heavens and the present earth passing away, and new heavens and a new earth appearing in their room, and that heavenly city or new Jerusalem coming down among men, in which the presence and favour of the Deity, and an exemption from pain and death, and all the evils of the present state were to be enjoyed. "And I saw," says St. John, "a new heaven and a new earth and the heavenly city the new Jerusalem coming down from God — and I heard a voice saying, behold

the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and he shall wipe all tears from their eyes—and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things are passed away—and he that sat upon the throne said, behold I make all things new. I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, and I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." To the same purpose St. Peter in his second Epistle, after describing the death of this world by a future general conflagration, adds, "nevertheless we according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." It is likewise to to this representation that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews refers, when he says of the Christians to whom he wrote, "that they were come to Mount Sion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, and the general assembly and church of the first-born, and an innumerable company of angels."

The words of my text immediately follow John's description of that future better state of things which is hereafter to take place, and

acquaint us who are to be made partakers of its happiness, namely *those that overcome*, or those who in the warfare appointed to mankind in this world maintain their integrity, and abide true to religious virtue. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things;" perhaps the original words might have been as well translated, "he that overcometh shall inherit all these things," that is, all the happiness just described. This the apostle gave as an assurance from the Supreme Deity, and he is represented as further declaring, that he "will be the God of him that overcometh, and that he shall be his son." "He that overcometh shall inherit all these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." I consider this as a striking part of Scripture. It informs us that after the universal resurrection, all the virtuous part of mankind are to take possession of new heavens and a new earth, in which (under the special protection of the Deity) they are to feel no more trouble, and to die no more; the wicked, at the same time, or (as they are called in the verse after my text) the fearful, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, and all liars being condemned to have their part in that lake

burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

My present design is to give you an account of the character here mentioned, *'him that overcometh*, and 2dly, of the reward and happiness annexed to it, *he that overcometh shall inherit all these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*

In order to obtain a just idea of the character here mentioned, it is necessary we should consider, 1st, the principles under the influence of which the person who overcomes acts; 2dly, the enemies he encounters; and 3dly, his perseverance in a succesful conflict till the end of life. These particulars united will give us a complete idea of him. The principles which influence him are chiefly the love of truth and righteousness, — the desire of maintaining the order of his mind, — a sense of duty to the governor of the world, — a regard to his own happiness, and the hope of heavenly assistance.

In the 1st. place, he acts under the influence of a love to truth and righteousness.

This is the fundamental principle of all genuine virtue, nor can any being possess merit as a moral agent, except as far as he is governed by it. Truth and righteousness have the same venerableness and excellence with God's eternal nature, and they are the guides of all his dispensations. They ought therefore to be the first objects of the regard of his intelligent creatures, as far as he has made them capable of perceiving them, and to this conduct they require their constant attention and labour should be directed. The apprehension of rectitude and fitness in an action is the same with the apprehension of an obligation to perform it. It is an apprehension that binds us in a manner that makes us condemn and hate ourselves if we contradict it. This, therefore, is the motive that calls forth the exertion of the man who overcomes. His heart is inflamed with the love of moral excellence, and an attachment to what is fair, and worthy, and amiable. He cannot bear the thought of violating the rules of everlasting righteousness by which the world subsists, and of incurring, by a cowardly desertion of the cause of truth, the aversion of his own mind, and disgrace among all wise and virtuous beings. He values his own

honour and dignity, and resolves not to debase himself by making his precious mind the seat of pollution, guilt, and slavery. He is further influenced by reverence for the Deity, and a regard to his authority. Nothing is plainer than that it must be the will of God that we should act by the same rule that He acts, and be righteous as He is righteous. He therefore must command righteousness, and all who deviate from it must be the objects of his displeasure. The person I am describing acts under this persuasion. He looks to God as the Sovereign Disposer of his existence, and the Ruler of all events, and nothing can appear to him more shocking than disobedience to him, and an ungrateful opposition to his authority. It is his ambition to approve himself to Him, and to shew himself his loyal and faithful subject. He knows that God appoints him this warfare, and calls him to it, and that he cannot avoid it without forfeiting his allegiance to him. These are properly religious motives, and it is absolutely necessary that these should be united to the moral motives above-mentioned in order to render us strictly upright. Though the native beauty of virtue and the perception of obligation inseparable from it, should be

sufficient in all cases to determine our wills, and must be the leading principle in every virtuous mind, yet so imperfect are we that it cannot be expected we should maintain an uniform course of virtuous conduct without the aid of additional motives taken from the consideration, that the obligations of rectitude are the laws of the Deity; and even these motives combined require to be further aided by an attention to the sanctions annexed to God's laws, and a sense of the necessity of obeying them in order to secure the effects of God's favour, and to escape future punishment.

I know that acting from a regard to the rewards of virtue and the punishment of vice has been represented as mercenary, and therefore not a proper principle of virtuous obedience. But this is by no means true. A regard to our own interest is in general a just and right principle; and acting from it is in numberless instances not only innocent but praise-worthy. Of this we are continually sensible in the common course of our temporal affairs; a person who carelessly and imprudently neglects his own interest being always an object of condemnation. But when

this interest is our ultimate interest, — our interest in another world, — an interest dependent on the favour of God and our obedience to his laws, the neglect of it must be particularly criminal. But what deserves most to be observed in this case is, that the reward promised to virtue is virtue itself, or higher degrees of it in those habitations of the just, into which nothing that defileth can enter. The happiness a good man expects in consequence of his services, is a deliverance from the power of sin, — higher degrees of moral and intellectual improvement, and opportunities of greater services, and a more extensive usefulness. And surely such a happiness is a laudable and worthy object of our pursuit, and it is folly to pretend that any influence that the prospect of it can have on our virtuous practice, can derogate from its worth and acceptableness.

I have added that the person who overcomes is further actuated by the hope of heavenly assistance. He feels his own weakness and frailty; but at the same time is encouraged by the reflection that he is to fight under God's eye and protection, and that if not wanting to himself he is sure, through his

grace, of obtaining a victory. He relies therefore on God's support, knowing that, as a holy Being, he must be the friend of all holy desires, and can never suffer any of his creatures to be defeated in their virtuous exertions, for want of any help that it is proper for Him to give. In this reliance he is confirmed by the Christian revelation, in which he finds many promises of grace and help to sustain him under difficulties, and to carry him through temptations and trials. Thus, he is informed in particular, that there is a Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and Sanctifier of good men, and that God is ready to give this Holy Spirit, that is, his supporting influence to all that ask Him; and He has also, as a believer in the gospel, an encouragement of unspeakable force in the example of victory and its rewards, which Christ has given him, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the Cross and despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, being invested with power to succour them that are tempted, and to communicate to his faithful followers all necessary supplies of grace and assistance; so that every one of us may now say with St. Paul,

I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.

These, then, are the principles and encouragements which influence the person who undertakes the warfare referred to in my text. Truth and reason, the authority of the Deity, and the allegiance and gratitude due to Him; his own dignity and final happiness, and the assurance of having heaven on his side, all unite in calling him out into this conflict, and in determining him to exert in it all the energies of his soul.

Let us next recollect the enemies he encounters, and the difficulties he is to surmount. These are various and numberless; but they have commonly been arranged under the three heads of the world,—the flesh—and the devil; but they may with more propriety be comprehended under the two first of these heads, the devil certainly having no other power over us than is implied in the temptations of the world, and the lusts of our own hearts. The latter are domestic enemies, or enemies within our own breasts; and the former are external enemies, that is enemies

which are thrown in our way by the opposition of our fellow-creatures, and the wickedness with which we are surrounded. The enemies within our own breasts which we have to contend with are, all our inferior powers and animal desires and affections, for there is not one of these which will not sometimes assail our integrity, and solicit us to sin. They are indeed our most formidable enemies, and were it not for the aid they give, our other enemies would have little power. Our greatest danger arises always from the irregularities of our desires, and the treachery of our wills; and our hardest struggle is with our appetites and passions. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; that is, our sensual, our avaricious, and ambitious desires are continually rising up in rebellion against the sovereignty of reason, and subjecting us to criminal conduct. It is difficult to keep them within proper limits, and to prevent them from breaking in upon our peace and innocence. But this must be done. Exorbitant passions must be restrained, and all those hostile attempts resisted. We must cut off (as our Saviour speaks) a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, whenever they come in competition with our

duty; or (in other words) we must sacrifice gratifications the most agreeable, and interests the most dear, whenever we cannot retain them without relinquishing the interest of truth and virtue. We must watch on all occasions our lower powers, subdue the excesses of fear, self-love, and resentment, — extirpate vicious habits, and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. In a word we have ourselves to contend with and to conquer.

Let us next look to the world and survey the enemies without us, which the person meant in my text is to contend with. That bewitching object to which we give the name of pleasure, promising festivity and joy, and surrounded with scenes of dissipation and gaiety, will present itself to him, and invite him by soft indulgencies to mirth and ease, and voluptuousness. Profit and honour will spread their snares for him. Pomp and power, and the emoluments attending them, will entice him to purchase them at the expence of his virtue. Or if none of these enemies come in his way, the force of ridicule may attempt to drive him into guilt, and it may be necessary to submit to shame in order to avoid deserving shame. Wicked

men may insult him, poverty may threaten him, — his own nearest kindred may reproach him, and persecution in all its frightful forms may attack him, and it may not be possible for him to abide faithful to God and truth without suffering the loss of goods, the miseries of a dungeon, and perhaps at last a cruel death. This happened to the first Christians, and it has happened more or less to many good men since. All these enemies the truly virtuous man must overcome. Neither pleasure nor profit, nor any of the pomps and vanities of this world, nor his own heart's lust, nor persecution, nor the terrors of death itself must conquer his resolution. All that is inconsistent with a steady loyalty of heart to God's government he must give up, and all that is necessary to maintain a good conscience he must consent to suffer. It remains to be added (in order to complete this account) that he must persevere in a successful opposition to those enemies till the end of life. He cannot be said to have overcome, until he is brought to the conclusion of his warfare, and has shewn himself faithful unto death. It is not enough that he begins well, and makes perhaps, for some time, many successful efforts; but he must hold on, and con-

tinue resolute and intrepid till his enemies cease from troubling him, and he is *taken out of the field.* If we desert or draw back, we are told that "God will have no pleasure in us."

Such is the arduous work in which the person who deserves the character in my text is engaged. Such are his difficulties, and dangers, and toils, and such his perseverance. You may here well ask, who is sufficient for such a contest? Or, how can creatures so weak as we are be a match for such enemies, or entertain any hope of victory? I have already answered this enquiry. It is indeed a hard contest, and requires much exertion. But there is no reason for despondence. We have the smiles of the Deity to animate us, — his favor to encourage us, and his almighty power to assist us. Fortitude and vigilance united to the all-sufficient grace of Christ, cannot but issue in success and triumph. "Who," says St. Paul, "shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or sword, or nakedness, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come?

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

I have now given you an account (brief indeed and very imperfect) of the character referred to in the words *him that overcometh.* I have recited to you the principles of his conduct, — the enemies he conquers, — and his perseverance in a succesful conflict till death sets him free. I am next to give you an account of the happy consequences of his fortitude and perseverance. These are very strikingly expressed in my text. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.* In the first place he is possessed of that moral excellence which is the highest honor and dignity of a reasonable being. All honor compared with this is mean and despicable. It is nobler to conquer one's self than to conquer the universe. To reduce unruly passions, — to restrain appetite when it cannot be gratified, — to suppress the risings of envy, lust, and pride, and contemn danger and even death itself in a virtuous pursuit; — this is indeed heroism; this gives a character more lustre than all the titles and grandeur and advantages that this world can bestow. If

then you wish for glory, seek it here. Not from dominion over others, but from self dominion. Not from the stare of your fellow-men, or any of that gaudy tinsel that dazzles too often unthinking mortals, but from wisdom and virtue, — from being good and doing good, — from an invariable uprightness of conduct and a faithful adherence to your duty as a moral agent and a candidate for eternity. Thus will you be the honourable and great, and princes and kings the ignoble and base. Thus will you afford a spectacle that will delight superior beings, while the children of sensuality and ambition are held by them in detestation. The sublimest prospect in nature is that of a person solicited by temptations, but deaf to every call but that of rectitude, — impelled to wickedness by his passions, but remaining master of himself, — struggling with misfortunes, but patient and submissive, — allured by vice and courted by pleasure, but firm in his virtuous course, — abused and persecuted, but always true to his principles, and at last sacrificing, not only every worldly emolument, but life itself, to his integrity. I may truly say (with an old philosoper) that this is a spectacle on which God himself looks down with delight.

But this leads me, in the next place, to observe, that the man who overcomes, possesses the approbation of the Deity. This is, without doubt, the first and the most valuable of all blessings. The words of my text direct our thoughts particularly to it, by announcing to us, as from God himself, that he will be the God of *the man that overcomes, and that he shall be his son.* What a privilege must this be! What a distinction, greater than words can express or heart conceive, does it imply to be approved and loved, and as it were adopted by the Parent and Sovereign of Nature? How anxious are men in their desires to obtain honour from one another? How do they exult when they can boast of their relation to worms like themselves who happen to be decorated with ribbands, mitres, or crowns? What an infatuation must possess us if we do not value infinitely more that relation in which (according to my text) a virtuous man stands to the greatest and best of beings? But it is necessary to add, that as a son of God, he is entitled to an inheritance. This is plainly intimated by the words, *he that overcometh shall inherit all things.* Sons are the heirs of their parents, and in conformity to this idea, the sons of God are declared to be heirs of God. Thus St. Paul reasons

(Rom. viii. 16) *if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*

It may not be improper here to observe, that the excellence of the inheritance is always in proportion to the rank and power of the parent. What then must be the excellence of the inheritance of a son of God? St. Peter calls it *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us.* It is the inheritance of a kingdom that cannot be moved, — "an inheritance consisting of a crown of life, of treasures that cannot fail, and an exceeding and eternal weight of glory," in that country beyond the grave where the virtuous are to meet. Rich, indeed, will be this inheritance, and the faintest hope of it should be sufficient to make us insensible to all the glory of this world, and to annihilate all its temptations. Happy then is the man who overcomes. Even in this life he is the happiest of mankind; for with a good conscience he possesses inward health and liberty and peace, — the supports of God's grace, and the assurance of his favour. These are the best of all present blessings, but they are only a pledge and fore-taste of future, greater blessings. The man who overcomes (you have heard) is honoured with

the relation of a son to that Being who has all the wealth of nature at His disposal, and he may expect that nature will be made to furnish its richest stores to bless him. In this book of the Revelations we are told, that "*he shall eat of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God, and not be hurt by the second death;* — *that he shall be confessed before Christ by his father and the angels;* — *that he shall be made a pillar in the temple of God, and go out no more,* — *and that he shall sit with Christ on his throne, even as he also overcame, and is set down with the father on his throne.*"

And now, after this account of the reward of overcoming, what remains but that I ask you what you will do? Enter yourselves under the banners of Christ and engage in this warfare, or shrink from it and resign yourselves to slavery and misery? With such a prospect before you as I have described, and such encouragement, can you indulge inactivity and sloth? In a contest so honourable and glorious will you not exert all your powers, and resolve to maintain an inviolable integrity, that you may be dignified with the title of the Sons of God, and as joint heirs

with Christ, rise to a place on his throne. Recollect the words I have just recited from Revelations iii. 31. "*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my father on his throne.*"

Are there within us any aspiring principles? Can we think of sacrificing to the fear of man or the corruptions of the world our loyalty to God, our dignity as reasonable beings, and our hopes as immortal beings? Oh, let us, fellow-christians, take up arms against our enemies — disdain the shameful servitude of sin, and press forward with zeal *towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* And that we may be enabled to do this with greater success let us labour to increase our faith, that is, to increase our attention to religious truths, and to work into our minds a deeper sense of their importance. Often view the crown which is held up to you and ready to be given you. Think that you have Christ calling to you in the words in the Revelations xxii. 12. "*Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be.*" Contemplate the example of victory and con-

sequent exultation and triumph which you have in the captain of your salvation, and the author and finisher of your faith. Consider his admonition to his followers, John xvi. 23. "*In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good comfort, I have overcome the world.*"

Let us further, in order to gain more strength in this contest, think how transitory human life is, and how soon our difficulties will be over. But more especially let me caution you against admitting a parley with your enemies. To parley in this case, is to capitulate. Never suffer yourselves to hesitate about avoiding a wrong action. Take care of going into the way of temptation. Flee from all the occasions of guilt and all the approaches to it. In short, be always on your guard, and remember for what you are struggling: — for the order of your minds, — for internal peace — for the cause of truth and virtue — for a place among the saints in the city of the living God — for heaven and immortal glory. Remember likewise how vile your adversaries are. Low passions, brutal lusts, and wicked men, or (as St. Paul speaks) spiritual wickedness in high places and the rulers of the darkness of this world. These

are God's enemies as well as yours. Powerful indeed, but powerful only because you make them so by carelessness, and sloth, and irresolution. Remember further the friends you have in this contest. All the wise and virtuous — God who sees you with approbation, fighting in his cause, and against his enemies. — Christ, who has himself been engaged in a like contest, and is now set down at the right hand of power. Oh, be firm then and faithful. Fight and overcome. God will be with you, and the joys of eternity will make infinite amends for the bravery of an hour. To say no more: May the God of peace bruise Satan under your feet; and may each of us be able to say, at the close of life, with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight: I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will bestow upon me, and not on me only, but on all the faithful and worthy."

THE END.

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